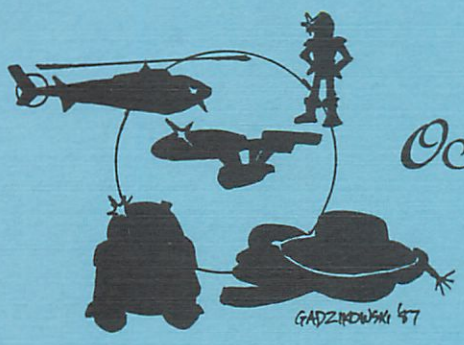
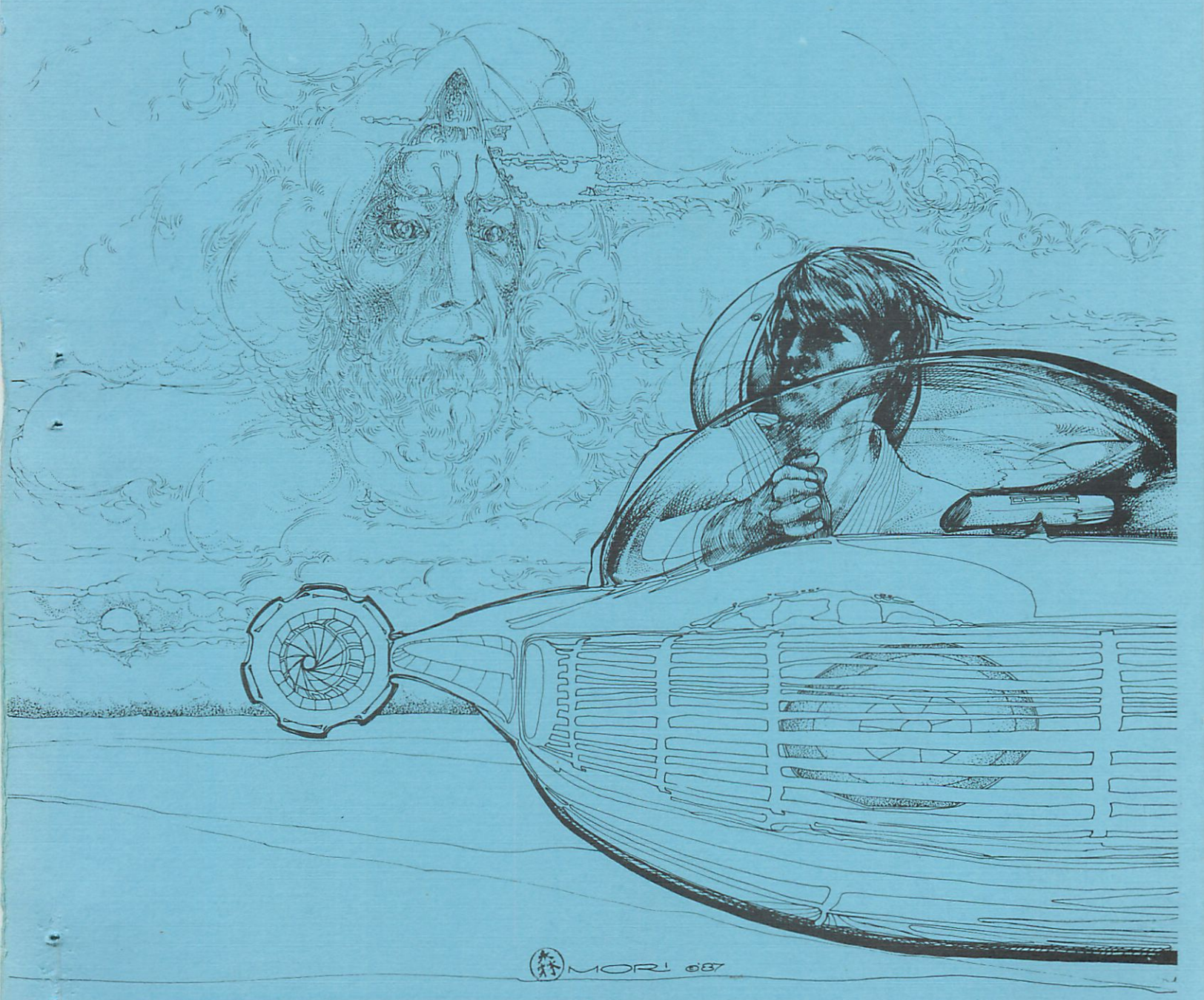


The OSIRIS Files

No. 1



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THE OSIRIS FILES is intended solely for the enjoyment of fans of media fantasy and science fiction. Submissions and letters of comment are both encouraged and welcomed. Correspondence requiring a reply should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All correspondence will be considered for publication unless clearly noted otherwise. All submissions and correspondence should be addressed to THE OSIRIS FILES, c/o OSIRIS Publications, 8928 North Olcott Avenue, Morton Grove, Illinois 60053.

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A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE STAFF OF THE OSIRIS FILES

We take great pleasure in welcoming you to the first issue of THE OSIRIS FILES. Over eight years ago, with a BATTLESTAR GALACTICA fanzine known by the unlikely name of PURPLE AND ORANGE?, we began an adventure into media science fiction fandom. As time passed, we found our BATTLESTAR GALACTICA fanzine increasingly more restrictive, until we could no longer possibly confine ourselves to the limits of that one universe; too many of us had too many other interests. And so PURPLE AND ORANGE? was laid to rest at the end of 1986. And a new adventure began.

In this and forthcoming issues of our new general media fanzine, you will find the ultimate in quality fiction and art, which we trust will entertain you with adventure, drama, tragedy, comedy, and romance. We welcome all universes here, and will try to bring you, our treasured readers, whatever most interests and delights you.

In our premiere issue, you will meet Stringfellow Hawke (AIRWOLF), who is captured by a ghost from his past -- and is in very real danger of becoming a ghost himself when Archangel is convinced he has turned on the Firm. You will briefly fly with the angels -- well, with Ralph Hinckley, guardian angel (GREATEST AMERICAN HERO) -- who is relieved to know his newest acquaintance doesn't think he is a bird, or worse yet, an airplane. You will view the Destruction of the Twelve Colonies (BATTLESTAR GALACTICA) from a new vantage point, on the militarized planet Sagittara, and will witness a reunion of old friends.

And you will also find the only authorized continuation of "Survive the Alliance," our epic multi-universe tale of the Visitors, the human Resistance on Earth, the Colonial Fleet, and the Cylons. This story was created for OSIRIS Publications and began between the covers of PURPLE AND ORANGE?, our predecessor fanzine; it will conclude in THE OSIRIS FILES. The enemies gather once more, and Earth's very survival is at stake...

And now, welcome to this first issue -- and to the many worlds -- of THE OSIRIS FILES!

EDITORIAL: An Armed Camp?

There is a growing tendency in the community loosely called "fandom" that we, as concerned members of that community, find highly disturbing. It is the tendency to mimic one aspect of what we refer to as the mundane world, and take weapons with us wherever we go.

This past summer marked the first "Weaponscon" in Atlanta, Georgia, an event where all fans attending had to carry a weapon of some sort at all times. For those who didn't bring one, the convention committee obligingly provided a "weapon" for everyone -- in the form of a membership badge shaped like a dagger. Not every weapon at the convention was real -- but they might have

been. And this -- the very concept of Weaponscon -- is what disturbs us.

More and more, we read about accidents involving weapons. And more and more, we see fans at conventions wandering from room to room, panel to panel, event to event, carrying their assorted knives, swords, and guns with them wherever they go. We grant certain weapons have their place -- but only at certain times, and under certain conditions. While there is certainly no need to wield a sword in an art show, we admit a fantasy barbarian would probably look quite ridiculous in a masquerade presentation if he stalked his enemy without one.

We feel a serious problem concerning weapons -- both ancient and futuristic -- exists in fandom today. Every time a sword or dagger is drawn to display to a friend or acquaintance, there is a potential for disaster. As examples, we present two possible scenarios.

A fan holds a drawn sword in his hand, showing it to a friend in a crowded dealers' room. Someone accidentally jostles him in the crowd -- and someone else equally accidentally gets cut, perhaps badly.

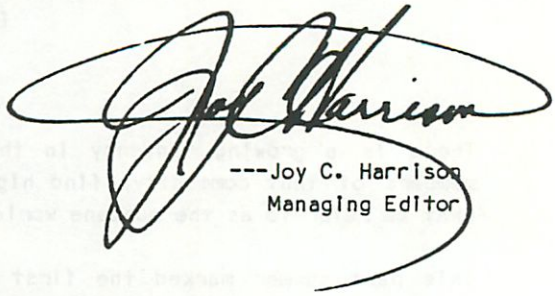
A fan fires his fully functional home-made laser into the air as part of a presentation at a masquerade, just as someone enters the room from the rear. Unfortunately, the newcomer is directly in the line of fire -- and equally unfortunately, that person finds himself permanently blinded, the delicate retina of his eye destroyed by an invisible laser beam.

Impossible? Not at all. It is no more impossible than a child accidentally killing his best friend with his father's gun -- and that, as we well know, happens all too often. Nearly every fan who attends major conventions has seen potentially hazardous incidents occur time and time again. That these accidents have not yet resulted in serious injury is more or less a matter of luck.

Time is against us in this, for more and more people are attending science fiction conventions -- and many of these people simply do not know how to handle themselves around weapons, or how to handle the weapons themselves. The danger is very real.

And there is no reason for this danger to exist at all. Why should fans need to carry weapons at a convention? As the conventions become larger, as more and more people discover the wonders of science fiction, fantasy, and fandom, we find amongst ourselves an increasing need for a new maturity. Anyone so insecure as to need a knife, sword, or gun on his person while wandering the halls of a convention hotel is far too immature to be allowed to attend a convention by himself. He is a danger, both to himself and to all those around him.

We maintain that the possibilities for disaster are endless. Isn't it time fandom grew up, at least a little?



---Joy C. Harrison
Managing Editor

NONE SO BLIND



"None So Blind"

(By Linda Ruth Pfonner)

A black helicopter, sleek and deadly-looking, hovered nine stories above the street, just outside an apartment building in downtown Los Angeles.

"Is he visible yet?" the pilot inquired.

"The apartment's empty. We can't hover here too long," the engineer fretted. "Somebody's gonna call the cops."

"Don't worry," the pilot replied soothingly. "He'll be here. And it's the middle of the night. Hardly anybody's going to notice us out here. Besides, what could the police do?"

His companion started to argue, then caught a glimpse of something on his scanner screen. "There! He's coming in now. Stand by... Give him time to get inside..."

The helicopter rocked slightly as the pilot shifted in his seat, flexing his hand on the controls.

"...Now!"

The pilot's hand tightened on his firing control, and bullets from the helicopter's chain-guns laced the apartment, demolishing everything.

"Got 'im!" the engineer exulted. "Let's get out of here!"

Before he could even finish speaking, the helicopter was climbing, leaving one apartment out of hundreds ruined, one man out of thousands messily dead. Sirens wailed on the street below, but the deadly black aircraft was long gone before the police thought of calling in air support of their own.

And that was number fourteen.

* * * * *

"Well?"

Marella took a deep breath. She hated making these reports. "Another successful assassination last night, sir."

"Details." The order was perfunctory.

"Nguyen Kao Jho, age thirty-seven, Vietnamese immigrant, granted U.S. citizenship 4 April 1976. He was employed by the Firm in Viet Nam, in various capacities, from 3 August 1970 until 1 December 1974. He escaped Saigon aboard an airlift on 30 April 1975 -- the last day of U.S. presence. Several dozen thirty-calibre chain-gun bullets were sprayed through his ninth-floor

apartment from a helicopter hovering outside. The description of the helicopter, given by witnesses in neighbouring apartments, is sketchy, but conforms to other sightings at the scenes of the other assassinations."

"AIRWOLF," Michael Coldsmith-Briggs III said bitterly. "Dammit, I wish I knew why!"

"Sir..." Marella squared her shoulders as he rounded on her savagely. "Sir, the description of the helicopter alone is not conclusive evidence. AIRWOLF was intentionally designed to resemble a standard -- albeit expensive -- executive helicopter, so she could pretend to civilian, unarmed status unless and until it became necessary to actively change that status.

"Hawke has no motive for these murders. All fourteen victims were actively employed by the Firm while he was in Viet Nam, yes. But he stayed in 'Nam for nearly six years, sir! After Saint John was lost, he never even took a leave outside the country. He would certainly have attempted to remain behind if he hadn't been in the hospital when Saigon fell. Most of these victims helped him look for his brother, or at least made it possible for him to continue looking. Why would he be systematically killing them off now?"

Her superior leaned on his desk, rubbing his temples. Marella bit her lip. This hurt Michael, too, and she knew he was taking a lot of flak from the Committee -- his personal liegeman was running amok, and they all knew it.

He didn't answer her directly. "Call him in, will you, Marella? If he's innocent -- or if he thinks he's safe -- he'll come. But I want to talk to him face to face."

* * * * *

Stringfellow Hawke was puzzled by the summons to Langley. Marella's voice had been tight with suppressed emotion, but he hadn't been able to crack her shielding to find out what was bothering her. Whatever it was, it had to involve Michael. So it never occurred to him to refuse, much as he disliked venturing into the lion's mouth, as it were. After all, if the Firm decided to cut their losses, they could just as easily take him, and trust to his own threatened booby trap on AIRWOLF to remove the helicopter from action.

That's dumb, he told himself as he headed for Michael's office, a security badge hanging from the pocket of his suit coat. Michael approves of this arrangement of ours. And since that problem in Germany, even Zeus approves, if grudgingly. Nothing's going to happen...

But he couldn't relax. Something was seriously wrong; he could feel it in the air. He walked gingerly down the carpeted hallway, feeling as if he walked on eggs.

Marella opened the door at his knock, greeting him with a fervor he ordinarily would have teased her about. It was a running joke between them that she had a hidden passion for him, or possibly for Dominic Santini, although she always insisted her concerns were strictly for Michael and for AIRWOLF, in that order.

But today, there was no humour in him, and one look at Marella told him there was none in her, either. He squared his shoulders, and faced the silent man behind the desk.

* * * * *

In another part of the building, not far from Michael's office, one of the women on Marella's

staff picked up a telephone and dialed an outside line.

"He's here," she told the man who answered. "No, I don't know when he'll be leaving. He may not be. You'll just have to stay ready." She paused for a moment, listening. "I'll warn you if I can. Good-bye."

* * * * *

The Deputy Director of the Firm sat with his back to the office, his fingers steepled before him, his attention focussed on the bright afternoon outside the wide windows. "Where were you last night?"

Hawke frowned. "Home. Why?"

"When was the last time you took AIRWOLF out?"

"Thursday. That courier mission we did for you. Will you tell me what's wrong?"

Michael sighed. "You may as well give it up."

"Give what up?" Hawke was thoroughly confused, and fear was growing in him. Whatever it was, it was bigger than he was, too big to fight...

"This pretense of innocence! I don't care about Dominic; he's always been your responsibility. But I trusted you, Hawke! And this is how you repay me? How much are they paying you? And who are they? I think I deserve at least that much!"

He felt the lion's jaws closing on him; he could feel the fangs, and smell the predator's hot breath on his back. "I don't know what you're talking about, Michael. Just what is it I'm supposed to have done?"

"Marella." Archangel's icy voice conveyed an order to speak.

She swallowed hard when she saw the bewildered, trapped look in Hawke's eyes. "Over the past three weeks, fourteen people who either were or have been employed by the Firm have been murdered."

Hawke didn't speak, but turned to watch the reflection of Michael's face in the window glass. The woman took a deep breath and went on.

"These fourteen men all had several other things in common, besides simply being ours.

"First, they were all employed by the Firm in Viet Nam, at some time during the period 1970 through 1975."

Hawke blinked. He had been in Viet Nam throughout that entire time frame -- but so had thousands of other Americans, both servicemen and civilians.

"Second, they were all involved, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, in your search for Saint John."

He swallowed dryly. It was impossible not to see where the conversation was leading.

"Third," she stated, her voice betraying her own distress, "all were killed by thirty-calibre machine or chain-guns fired from a helicopter hovering outside a window. All descriptions of the helicopter agree it is a Bell 222, painted black or dark charcoal, with a white or light grey underside."

"Michael, you can't think that I..."

"Don't try to deny it!" the man code-named Archangel cut him off. "I don't have enough evidence to have you arrested -- yet. As Marella keeps pointing out, all the evidence is circumstantial. I can't prove you're killing them off. But this has got to stop! I don't care what they're offering you!"

Hawke ignored the accusations, and turned toward Marella. "Who's dead?" he demanded.

She handed him a list of names, and he scanned it rapidly. He did know them all -- or had.

"Michael, I haven't seen any of these people since early 1975, before I was shot down that last time. Why should I want any of them dead? They tried to help me! Chan Ki damned near got skinned by the NVA when he was caught trying to infiltrate a prison camp to see if Saint John was being held there. It took me four days to get him out, and I had to mortgage my soul to the medics to get him treated. And it was Li Tong who pulled me out of the wreckage the last time I went down. He saved my life! Why would I take his? You're crazy!"

"According to our psych department, you're the one who's unstable," Marella said miserably, avoiding his eyes. "You're anti-social, a self-proclaimed hermit...you've had a license to kill...you've suffered a series of traumatizing losses...and you've refused to accept the possibility that your brother is dead..."

"I never said that," he growled. "I just want to know. That's all I've ever asked of you -- hard data. One way or the other."

"I assume," Michael said so acidly that Hawke turned to stare at him, "that someone else offered you something you wanted more than what I offered. I'm really disappointed in you, Hawke. I would have expected you to at least give me a chance to meet their bid."

"Michael..."

Archangel cut him off. "I'm not really interested in your rationalizations about it. It doesn't matter. You're staying here, in custody, until we unravel this entire plot."

The office door opened, and Hawke whirled. He froze in mid-motion, his hands carefully held away from his body. The two M.P.'s in the doorway were both armed, and both weapons were aimed directly at him. Trapped, he turned to glare at Michael.

"Thanks. It's always nice to know who your friends really are..."

Archangel still didn't turn to face him. "You aren't under arrest. This is just detention for questioning."

Hawke didn't move until the M.P.'s came close, holstered their side-arms, and laid ungentle hands on him, intending to hustle him out. Until that moment, he hadn't decided what to do. The

M.P.'s were each a full head taller than he, and each easily outweighed him by fifty pounds. But at the first touch of their hands, he exploded into savage, blurringly fast motion. Both M.P.'s were down, unconscious, before they had time to blink, and Hawke scooped up a fallen side-arm as he headed out the door. He was gone before either Michael or Marella could react.

Archangel sighed wearily, and spun his chair around slowly, facing the room for the first time.

"You knew you could never take him into custody," his assistant accused him. "Why did you try?"

He avoided meeting her eyes. "The Committee Posted him this morning."

She gasped. "Posting" was Firm shorthand. It meant all active-duty agents had been notified that Hawke had turned, and was, therefore, fair game, to be shot on sight.

"Keeping him here," the man continued, "was the only way to keep him alive long enough to get to the bottom of this whole mess."

Marella looked at the two men Hawke had gone through to escape -- both were still unconscious -- and shivered. "Sir? What if he uses AIRWOLF to fight back? He has no reason to hide any longer..."

* * * * *

There was only one way off Langley Air Force Base without credentials, and Hawke was certain Archangel had invalidated his the moment he was out of sight. He stole the first jeep he found, and headed for the helicopter pad. Nestled in among the military vehicles and a few ostensibly civilian craft was Michael's own Angel.

A wintry smile flickered across the hunted man's face, and he headed for her. As he expected, there was no real guard. The Firm would be reluctant to admit to the Air Force -- which ran the base -- that they were hunting one of their own. Besides, it was only poetic that he should escape in his erstwhile friend's own private craft.

He started her up with no problem, and was already airborne before the sergeant in charge came running out of his office. He couldn't hear what the man shouted, nor did he care.

Hawke made it off the base without difficulty -- the white helicopter was well known to all personnel -- and began to wonder where he should go. The Angel was extremely distinctive, and he couldn't keep her long.

I've got to warn Dom, he realized suddenly. Michael said he didn't care about him, but somebody else might. I've got to assume they've Posted me by now...

He reached for the radio, and was setting the Santini Air frequency when bullets cut the air all around the white helicopter. The radio forgotten, he twisted in his seat to look behind him.

Three Cobra gun-ships followed him. His head-phones crackled to life.

"Set that bird down, or be shot down, Hawke. We don't much care which."

He didn't bother to reply. The Angel wasn't armoured; he would have little chance if he tried to run. He pulled out the forty-five calibre automatic he'd taken from the M.P. and checked the

clip. Fully loaded. He prepared to sell himself dearly.

The white helicopter headed for the deck, and the Cobras followed her. Just as the landing gear was about to touch down, the Angel's tail whipped around in a fast pedal turn. In attempting to dodge the swinging tail, one Cobra crashed into the craft beside it, and both tumbled to the ground. The third pilot gave an inarticulate yell and charged, all his guns blazing.

Hawke cursed, and yanked at his controls. Bullets from the Cobra's guns ripped through the Angel's hull as if she were as ethereal as her namesake, and the control stick swung loose in his hand.

He tried to bank her away as another volley laced the cockpit. A savage blow to his left leg nearly threw him from his seat.

Hawke gasped in pain, and looked down to see blood soaking his pants-leg. A wave of dizziness swept over him. Reality reeled around him as he remembered his last mission in 'Nam -- alone, like this, his crew dead all around him; wounded, like this, unable to fight or flee, like this, outnumbered, like this...

Her controls completely severed by gun-fire, the Angel plowed into the ground not a quarter of a mile from the wreckage of the two Cobras. Following orders, the crews of all three gun-ships came running. The first one died with a forty-five calibre bullet in his brain, and the others took cover.

But they outnumbered the embattled pilot. Eventually, they wore him out.

* * * * *

"We've found the Angel," Marella reported quietly. "Ten miles south of here. She was shot down. Total loss."

Archangel turned from the window, frowning. "And? Don't make me quiz you for every detail..."

"There was no body in the wreckage, but there was a lot of blood," she explained. "It typed out to match Hawke's. There was other wreckage nearby -- two armed Cobras. No bullet holes in either; they apparently ran into one another. No bodies there, either, and no appreciable amount of blood.

"They were not military or Firm aircraft, sir. I ordered no pursuit, and I know you didn't. The base commander wouldn't have done so without informing us. So -- who was chasing Hawke?"

"I'm sure we'll find out -- when some other agent turns him in for a commendation. If they took him alive, they may even squeeze him for AIRWOLF. The agent who turns both Hawke and AIRWOLF over to the Committee will get an impressive reward."

Marella stared at him, horror in her eyes.

* * * * *

Hawke's first sensation was one of pain. He hurt all over, and he made no attempt to move or open his eyes; that, he was sure, would only make the pain worse. Instead, he kept his breathing slow and shallow, and listened. There were people talking all around him.

Their words were difficult to make out. The first one he recognized was a name.

"...Archangel?"

"He'll be at the Sanctuary by the fifteenth. We'll meet him there."

"All right. It will be a very significant meeting."

Several people laughed and departed. He heard the clatter of their footsteps. But there was still a conversation going on near him.

"You can't use that stuff on a man with a concussion, Pam," a man's voice protested. "It might scramble his brain permanently, and then you wouldn't get anything out of him at all."

"He surely won't talk without being coerced," a woman's voice pointed out dryly.

"There are other ways of coercing a man into telling you what you want to know," the man grumbled.

"You just want to get your grubby little hands on him, Fred," the woman sneered. "He's not your type. Besides, he'd tear you to pieces. You're careless, and you know it."

"I've organized fourteen perfect assassinations," he retorted, stung.

"Yes, yes, and I'm sure the 'front office' will be pleased," a second woman interrupted. Her voice sounded familiar, and Hawke frowned faintly, trying to remember where he'd known her. "But your subject is waking up. Make your decisions now."

Having been discovered, Hawke opened his eyes and tried to move. It was fruitless. He was tied down to a table-top, his wrists and ankles cuffed to the legs. Nylon straps stretched over his body and, chokingly tight, over his throat. He couldn't do more than twitch.

As his awareness cleared further, he began to consciously take stock of his injuries. He felt bruised and battered all over, but that hardly counted. His head hurt -- he remembered hitting the console at the moment of impact, and killing at least three men who came after him. After that, everything got foggy, and faded out.

But that pain wasn't enough to worry him. What he <u>was</u> concerned about was the much more serious pain in his left leg, just above the knee. Any least attempt at motion hurt fiercely, and although he could feel the slight constriction of some sort of bandage over the wound, underneath the gauze he could feel a steady trickling warmth. The bone ached, and he wondered if the bullet had nicked it, or possibly even cracked it. It wasn't broken -- but such a slow, steady loss of blood could be even more dangerous in the long run.

The two women approached him, and Hawke retreated behind his well-used mask of impassive indifference. It became difficult to maintain the mask when he recognized the brunette.

<u>Charlene...</u> One of Marella's chief assistants, one of Archangel's executive staff. Her presence meant the day's events had all been some kind of elaborate charade, probably for the Committee's benefit. <u>Michael sacrificed me to Zeus in order to keep his cushy job as Deputy Director...</u>

<u>Oh, God, what about Dom...?</u>

"He recognizes me," Charlene drawled. "Should I be flattered?"

"Charlee..." the blonde spoke warningly.

But the brunette was oblivious. "If he knows me, Pamela, then he knows what we're going to do to him. That's good. A little anticipation never hurts." She stood over the bound, helpless prisoner, and smiled. "We want AIRWOLF, Hawke. And we'll get it from you. One way..." She gestured at Pamela, who was readying a hypodermic syringe with a professional deftness that spoke volumes. "...or another." She indicated Fred, who studied the prisoner's helpless body with an unhealthy avidity that made Hawke turn cold inside.

"Ladies first," Pamela announced. She tightened a tourniquet around his left arm to raise a vein, inserted the needle -- he twitched when he felt it -- and freed the band. A hot rush went through him, and he felt all his muscles sag as his mind fogged over. He lay very still, his eyes half-closed, luxuriating in the fact that the drug made the pain in his leg much easier to bear.

But after the drug had several minutes to establish itself in his system, the interrogation began.

"What is your name?"

"Ssstringfellow...Hawke..." He could hear the slowness of his response, the blurred pronunciation that was a product of the drug.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-four..."

"How long have you worked for the Firm?"

He tried to fight back, to refuse to answer, but it wasn't worth the monumental effort of will resistance required. "I don't..."

"You are a special agent for the Firm."

He shook his head slowly, groggily. "No..."

"You work for Michael Coldsmith-Briggs, for Archangel."

"No!" That was the truth. In a manner of speaking, Michael actually worked for him.

"Then who do you work for?"

He fought the question desperately, not wanting to involve Dominic if it could be at all avoided. "Santini Air...private charters an'...an' stunts..."

"You have AIRWOLF."

He could feel himself starting to drift, and encouraged it. Her last sentence wasn't a question, and the farther away he drifted, the easier it became to ignore things that didn't demand answers. He said nothing.

"Hawke!" The sound of his name brought his attention back. "How did you get AIRWOLF?"

He was still rather proud of it. "I stole 'er..."

"Where is AIRWOLF now?"

He wondered if Dominic might not be out practicing solo flights; he'd been talking about it. "I dunno..."

Charlene swore. "Where do you keep AIRWOLF between missions?"

"She's safe..." he mumbled tiredly.

"Where?"

"In th' Lair..." Wasn't that obvious? Where else would she be? Even Michael knew that...

He felt hands on his arm as Charlene reached for the hypodermic and injected another dose, trying to force the answers she wanted.

"Hawke! Where is this Lair?"

But as the drug hit him a second time, he gasped. What had been a hot rush the first time was now flames running through his body. The women were forgotten. He was trapped in burning wreckage... He would die, and neither Dom nor Michael would ever know he was innocent...

"Where is AIRWOLF's Lair?"

The shouted words meant nothing. He was Captain Hawke again, trapped in the wreckage of a burning Huey, surrounded by Vietnamese jungle, his right arm and shoulder smashed, his left trapped beneath him. He was unable to move. Flames licked at him; smoke choked him. He was going to die -- and then, who would continue the search for Saint John?

"Hawke! Where is AIRWOLF's Lair? Answer me!"

But he was lost in a decade-old nightmare, and didn't hear her. Nor, when he opened his eyes, did he see her. Instead, he saw the young Vietnamese soldier who had come back to pull him out of his wrecked and burning ship. He tried to smile through the pain and the helpless fear.

"Li Tong..."

Charlene slapped him. "Pay attention, Hawke. Where is the Lair? Where is AIRWOLF?"

Li Tong was as careful as he could be, considerate of the Captain's injuries, but the pain was too much to bear. Broken bones in his arm and shoulder grated agonizingly when the Vietnamese tried to move him, and Hawke gratefully surrendered awareness.

* * * * *

The telephone rang, and Dominic Santini leaned lazily over to grab it. "Santini Air," he said cheerfully.

"Dominic?"

He straightened up. "Marella? What's wrong?"

"Have you seen Hawke in the past two days? Or spoken to him at all?"

He frowned thoughtfully. "No. Why?"

There was a moment's pause. It was eloquent; Marella never did anything unintentionally. "We have made a...tactical error in dealing with him," she said slowly. "He stole the Angel, and escaped from Langley..."

"Escaped? Why should he've had to escape? What did you do to him?"

She explained, not trying to spare either herself or her superior. Then, reluctantly, she told him about the wreck of the white helicopter.

He was incensed. "He may be somewhere near there, hurt, or dying...! Dammit, Marella..."

"Dominic, there were other people there. The crews of the two Cobras survived. Hawke has been captured, and we don't know who has him. I guarantee this was not an official Firm operation."

"What do you want from me?" All his original amiability was gone.

She swallowed hard. "Dominic, I...I know he's innocent. I'm certain Michael knows it, too, though he can't admit it out loud. But the Committee Posted Hawke that morning. Every Firm agent on the planet is empowered to shoot him on sight. You're not included; you aren't a Firm employee, so we have no jurisdiction over you. But Hawke's connection with you is known, and, therefore, Firm personnel will haunt you and your business. Caitlin, too, I'm afraid."

He swallowed. "Is the cabin secure?"

"I doubt it," she replied slowly. "It's in his dossier."

"If he gets free, he may show up there."

"He was hurt in the crash," she protested. "How could he get up there?"

"I don't know," he admitted with some forced cheer. "But I gave up trying to figure out how he does things a long time ago."

"Well, if he contacts you..." Marella paused. "If he contacts you, tell him I'm trying to get the Posting lifted. I'll call you when I succeed -- but you keep him under cover until then!"

"I'll tell him," Santini promised. "If I see him."

"Thank you, Dominic. And...and I'm sorry. Believe that, please?"

"You sound as if you think he's dead."

"No agent has ever survived ten days under a Posting. His only hope is hiding out somewhere safe

until we can get it lifted. I don't think he realizes that. And two of his days are already gone."

"If he's a prisoner somewhere, that won't matter much, will it?" He hung up before she could respond.

For a long moment, he just sat, replaying the conversation in his head, trying to fully grasp the potential for horror. He felt terribly cold inside as he thought of Hawke's situation -- hunted by allies as well as foes, probably a prisoner already...

"Dom, is something wrong? You sounded so..." Caitlin O'Shaunessy's voice trailed off when she saw the forbidding expression on his face. "Dom...? What is it?"

He told her everything Marella had said. Halfway through the recital, she blindly sought a chair and collapsed into it. When he was finished, she sat still, horrified.

"What can we do?" she whispered. "How can we find him?"

"Marella's sure to be doing her usual detective work," he answered thoughtfully. "She'll call us with any information. There's no one in the Firm she can trust with it."

"Let's take AIRWOLF over to the wreck site. Maybe we can pick up something with the sensors that they missed."

"All right. It's sure better than sitting here and worrying." He didn't mention the other thought that occurred to him. If Hawke was being interrogated for AIRWOLF's location, and if he cracked -- which wasn't totally unimaginable -- then AIRWOLF would be safer in the sky, with them...

* * * * *

Hawke woke up slowly, aware first of extreme discomfort. He was stiff and sore, and his mouth tasted like a barracks floor on Sunday morning. His wounded leg was flaming agony, and his head throbbed as if someone was trying to open his skull with a jackhammer. He lay still and tried to listen past the pounding headache, to think past the pain. If he was alone, he was determined to try to escape.

He couldn't detect anyone near him. Accustomed to trusting the acuteness of his hearing, he opened his eyes.

He was alone. He lay flat on his back on a cold concrete floor. The room was small; he lay in a corner formed by two concrete walls, opposite another made of simple panelling. The door was a cheap interior one. The ceiling was made of suspended tiles, and the lighting was bright enough to hurt his eyes.

He tried to move, and found his hands were cuffed together in front. The connecting chain was padlocked to another, longer one, which was belted around him through the loops in his slacks. He struggled to sit up, leaning against the wall, clenching his teeth against the pain that flared in his leg when he moved it. His ankles were shackled together, and the chain padlocked to an eye-bolt driven into the concrete wall.

Hawke sagged against the cold wall, defeated. This was a professional job -- fine chrome steel

chains and Yale locks. He had nothing within reach or sight that might be used as a lock-pick, and he would need a torch or bolt-cutters to dispose of the chains.

There was no possibility of anyone coming to rescue him. He was a prisoner of the Firm, and they would never tell Dominic what happened. As far as Dom would ever know, he would simply have disappeared, never to be seen again. Eventually, Michael would convince him to surrender AIRWOLF.

His luck had finally run out.

A dull anger began to grow in him, warring with pain for his attention. Who does Michael think he is? What right does Zeus have to arbitrarily decide I'm a traitor, a murderer, and pronounce sentence on me without even a pretense of due process? If I just disappear like this, Dom will fairly well go out of his mind. I have to get out, get away, get free... If he could get word to Dominic where he was being held -- assuming he could figure that out -- Dom and Caitlin, in AIRWOLF, would surely come for him.

Hawke tried to find a slightly less painful position, but it couldn't be done. Dizzy, he collapsed back against the wall and closed his eyes, panting. Whatever "truth drug" Charlene had used on him, it didn't wear off quickly. He felt weak and groggy.

He assumed he hadn't given them much useful information -- there would be no reason to continue keeping him alive if he had talked. They'd just give him an overdose, and dump the body some place where the vultures and coyotes would oblige by removing the evidence. He remembered little of the interrogation itself; his dreams had all been of death and dying, and he avoided thinking about them.

He had nearly drifted off to sleep again when the door opened. His eyes snapped open at the sound, but he gave no other outward reaction. Of his three known captors, the one he wished least to face alone was the man standing in the doorway.

Fred Patten savoured his prisoner's helplessness. Hawke met the inspection with an impassive stare, but shuddered under his cultivated stoicism when the older man smiled and licked his lips in anticipation. Hawke could see in Patten the signs of a warped and perverted personality that delighted in pain, both physical and emotional. He was careful not to move. The man reminded him, sickeningly, of Charles Moffett.

Patten smiled as he entered the room. His prisoner couldn't physically retreat, and refused to accept the psychological defeat of looking up at the other man. Hawke relaxed in the corner where he sat, and yawned, not bothering to look at his captor at all, depending on his other senses for clues.

"Sssoo..." The word was a reptilian hiss. "You would have done better to tell Charlee what she wanted to know. Much better. As undesirable as are the side effects of that nasty babble drug she likes so much, you would certainly prefer that to what either Pamela Moffett or I will do to you."

Hawke raked the man with a scorn-filled glance, using it as an excuse to study his foe's face for a moment.

Wait a minute! Pamela Moffett...?

"I see the name means something to you," Patten commented. "I, personally, never met the man, but

Pamela tends to wax voluble and savagely poetic on her father's virtues, and on her own rather nasty plans for the government agent who stole his ultimate creation, destroyed his reputation, and then murdered him in cold blood. Sometimes, I think Pamela is not quite sane."

"Charles Moffett," Hawke said dryly, surprised at how rusty his voice felt and sounded, "was psychotic. He deserved everything that happened to him."

"Of course, you would say that," Patten purred. "Since you are the government agent in question. But Pamela, I'm afraid, does not agree. And since Pamela attached Charlene, she no longer listens to me."

"So..." Hawke yawned again, and settled himself more comfortably in the corner. "Who gets me next? You, or Pamela?" He was very proud of that nonchalant tone; inside, he was shaking, fighting back an irrational desire to wrestle with the chains that held him. But his control was still perfect, and no sign of his struggle was visible.

"That depends entirely on you, Mr. Hawke," Charlene's voice answered his question, and he glanced toward the door, startled by her sudden appearance. "We could end all this unpleasantness much more quickly and easily if you would just tell us what we want to know."

"No."

"Really, Mr. Hawke." She sighed. "You are being foolish. All you are doing is slowing us down. Eventually, you will tell. You know that as well as I. Anyone can be broken."

He regarded her through half-closed eyes, hiding behind the mask of uncaring indifference he had been building and strengthening since the age of twelve. "Maybe," he allowed. "Eventually. I have all the time in the world. Do you?"

Her eyes flashed dangerously. Then she turned and called out loudly, "Pam! You ready for him?"

"Sure, Charlee," the other woman replied from outside the cell.

"Good. He's all yours. Fred gets the leavings, if there's any point to it by then."

"I always get left-overs, Charlene," Patten whined, the petulant tone sounding odd in a man more than fifty years old. "It isn't fair..."

"If you ever left anything behind, you might get healthier subjects!" Charlene snapped. "But you get too involved in the fun of it. You lose control. You're as bad as Charles was for using up your subjects."

They continued their conversation, but Hawke didn't hear. He was suddenly caught up in a shuddering memory. At least Gabrielle had a few moments to say good-bye to me. Here, I have no one, and the only people I care about will never know where or how I died...

"Hey, Fred!" Pamela called from without.

"Yeah?"

"Bring him out here for me, will you?"

Patten sighed theatrically. "I suppose. Can I at least watch?"

"Sure, Fred," she chuckled.

"I will come back later, Mr. Hawke," Charlene purred as she took her leave. "Perhaps you will have changed your mind..."

He didn't respond, but listened intently to the sounds of her retreating footsteps. Then he shifted his attention to Patten, who approached him casually.

Hawke was desperately afraid. This was certainly going to be the one and only chance he got. His timing had to be precise.

He watched through his eyelashes, trying not to stare, knowing an intent gaze could be felt, could arouse suspicion.

But Patten was oblivious to such nuances. He dropped to one knee beside the prisoner and fished a small key-ring from an inside pocket, then fitted one key into the padlock that anchored Hawke's ankle shackles to the wall.

Hawke watched, hardly daring to breathe, every muscle tensing slowly, as a lion's does while the gazelle wanders closer...

The padlock opened, the chain fell free from the eye-bolt -- and Hawke moved with the lightning precision and terrible power of the predator that was his namesake. His feet -- still shackled together, although no longer fastened to the wall -- struck Patten in the face, smashing his skull into the cement wall. The man left large blood stains as he slid, bonelessly limp, to the cold floor.

Hawke snatched at the keys, fumbling in his eagerness, and freed himself from the cold iron that bound him. Already thinking the escape out two or three steps ahead of his present accomplishment, he tried to stand up.

His wounded leg buckled under his weight, and he gasped, catching himself against the concrete wall as his senses swam. Blinking back tears of pain, he held onto the wall while he tried to force the pain under some kind of control.

Since he had awakened after the first interrogation, he'd had no conscious memory of the wound bleeding, but it was bleeding now. Dizziness overwhelmed him for a moment, and he closed his eyes until it passed. He couldn't run; he could hardly bear to stand. But he had to escape from this place, and these people. If he survived Pamela Moffett's treatment, he would die under Fred Patten's hand.

He squared his shoulders defiantly, refusing to tamely submit to the Firm's plans for him. He took a deep breath, and decided the only way to get it done was to do it. With a painful shadow of his usual wolf-like lope, he limped to the door.

It was standing ajar, and he peered out cautiously. He could neither see nor hear anyone, so he pushed it open and stepped through.

The room beyond was unoccupied, but not empty. There was a table covered with assorted medical equipment and, beside it, a large black metal box. He couldn't imagine what it might be, and

didn't really care. Trying to shake some of the cobwebs out of his mind, he headed for the door he could see in the opposite wall. His vision was darkening by the time he got there, but he blinked back the shadows and opened the door.

His heart sank. He was in a basement, facing a flight of open-backed wooden steps. They seemed to stretch upward into the darkened depths of outer space, but they were his only avenue of escape. He started to drag himself up, one riser at a time. Not thinking at all, he simply forced his body to move. Nothing mattered except that he keep moving...

Pamela had gone into another part of the basement, and expected to find her prisoner awaiting her ministrations when she returned. Instead, she found her laboratory empty. Annoyed, she went into the cell to berate Patten, and to fetch the prisoner herself.

But when she opened the door to the smaller room, she found only one man, and that one slumped on the floor, his face a bloody mess, the back of his skull smashed. She stared, shocked, at the body of her co-conspirator, and at the abandoned, empty shackles. It was a full minute before she could get her voice under control. Then she turned and ran out.

"Charlee! Charlee!" she yelled. "He's gone! He's gone!"

From upstairs, Charlene yelled back, "Gone? Who's gone?"

"Hawke!"

Only a step from the top of the staircase, Hawke looked up and saw Charlene above him, heard Pamela's shouting from below, and knew he had failed. Anger swept through him, blanking out the pain and weakness for a few important moments. He threw himself forward.

For all that she was a Firm agent, Charlene had never received the training of a field operative. Like Marella, like most of Archangel's female assistants, she was a technical associate. Hawke's headlong rush frightened her, and she flinched back with a startled cry.

Hawke wanted nothing so much as to just get past her and get free. He hit her hard, and she stumbled and fell backwards. He got his feet tangled in her skirt, and landed on top of her. She didn't move, and the fall knocked the wind out of him.

He was struggling to his feet when Pamela Moffett came up behind him and expertly sapped him. He landed beside Charlene, unconscious.

Panting, Pamela stood over the bodies for a moment, trying to come to terms with her sudden solitude. Fred Patten lay dead in the basement, his brains splattered across the floor. She knelt beside Charlene and shook her gently.

"Charlee? Charlee?"

Charlene's head lolled loosely, and Pamela caught her breath, horrified. "Oh, no..." she whispered. "Not Charlee, too... Not Charlee...!"

But Charlene was undeniably dead, her neck broken. Pamela slowly turned to her motionless captive, and madness glittered in her eyes.

"You did this..." she whispered, not caring that Hawke was unconscious and couldn't hear her.

"You did this..." Rising to her feet, leaving her lover without a backward glance, the woman stood over Hawke for a moment. Then, with a sudden insane viciousness, she kicked his limp, bloody body back down the stairs he had so laboriously climbed.

Her face set in lines of grim purpose, she went down after him.

* * * * *

AIRWOLF prowled the crash site, investigating the wrecked Angel, then hovering over the two crashed Cobras.

"I think Marella was right, Dom," Caitlin said quietly. "These two hit each other, and they're so close to the Angel... I think String faked them into it."

"Yeah," he agreed. "And then a third one came screaming in with everything blasting, and damned near cut the Angel in two."

"Looks like it."

"Do a slow circuit, Caitlin -- about a hundred feet up, spiraling away from the wrecks."

She wondered what he expected to see, but obeyed the instructions, moving AIRWOLF so slowly that the helicopter seemed like a race horse champing at the bit, impatient with the restraint.

"Ah-ha!" Santini's softly-voiced cry of triumph made her shiver.

"What do you see? C'mon, Dom..."

"New heading -- two-six-three, absolute. Go slow. This trail's so cold it's got icicles hanging off it."

"What do you see?" she insisted, even as she turned to follow the new course.

"Faint tire tracks -- a six-wheeled truck, rear-doubled. Heavy duty pick-up, or the kind of van that gets used for ambulances."

"Do you suppose somebody saw the wrecks and took him to a hospital?"

"Marella already thought of that," he told her. "She checked every medical facility within a hundred miles. No one fitting String's description. I think this is the truck the guys who captured him used. So, if we can track it, maybe we can find him."

"Oh, God, I hope so..." she breathed.

The next hour passed in nearly complete silence. Caitlin followed Santini's directions, while he coaxed every possible bit of resolution out of AIRWOLF's sophisticated surveillance systems.

Seventy-five minutes later, they were forty miles from the crash site, studying an isolated farmhouse.

"Well? What do you think?" Caitlin inquired. "There's no truck there now."


SA
TONI HARDEMAN 87

"Tell you what," Santini said thoughtfully. "According to the infra-red, there's only one person in there. Land me, and I'll go in and poke around."

"You take a radio," she ordered. "I want to know what's going on."

"Okay."

"And be careful. You won't do String any good if you get killed."

"Yes, mother..." he drawled sarcastically.

"I'm sorry, Dom, but..."

"Yeah. I know."

She put the helicopter into "stealth" mode and landed in the yard. Then, once Santini had disembarked, she took off again, intending to circle the house. She couldn't remain stationary on the ground; it made her feel trapped and helpless.

Dominic Santini squared his shoulders and headed up to the house. According to AIRWOLF's scanners, the building's single occupant was in the basement. He tried the front door and saw it had been broken open, probably with a crowbar. He entered cautiously.

The living room was empty except for some furniture; it was all draped with sheets. Whoever these people were, they had broken into a property to which they had no rights. He went into the kitchen, and stopped short.

A body lay on the floor -- a lovely, dark-haired girl all in white. After a moment's thought, Santini remembered her -- one of Archangel's girls. When Hawke had been kidnapped once by terrorists, it was Charlene, not Marella, who had given him his briefing on the situation.

He knelt beside her. She'd been dead at least several hours, maybe a full day. Her left hand clutched something. Curious, he pried her fingers open.

A silver bracelet rolled free. He picked it up, and the import of the words engraved on it screamed at him.

SAINT JOHN HAWKE

4-16-71

It was Stringfellow Hawke's bracelet.

Why would String kill Charlene? She must have ripped it off his wrist as she fell. And why didn't he notice, and get it back? He's never voluntarily taken it off...

But the bracelet was indisputable proof Hawke had been there.

He looked around warily. The body lay at the top of the basement steps. He listened carefully, and heard a quiet voice from below. Slipping the bracelet into his pocket, he stealthily started down the steps.

When he was about halfway down, he began to make out what the other person was saying. It was a

woman's voice, and the very tone dripped vitriol. It made him shudder to hear her.

"I told you I'd make you suffer," the woman purred. "I told you you'd be sorry for killing my father. And when I let you out, if I ever do, then you'll tell me what you did with my father's helicopter. You stole AIRWOLF. You have no right to it. My father built it. It's mine, Hawke! It's mine!"

Santini reached the lower level and saw a rather frazzled-looking young woman walking around a large black metal box. Eight feet by six, and nearly five feet high, it was shaped like a truncated pyramid with a series of meters on the front. The unmistakable sound of a heart monitor was clearly audible. The implication was obvious.

"Hey...!"

The girl whirled. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Where's Stringfellow Hawke?" he growled at her.

She backed up against the black box. "Who are you?"

"I'll ask the questions," he snapped. "Is he here?"

She flattened her hands against the box behind her. "You can't let him out!" she shrieked, her voice shrill. "He hasn't started screaming yet! He has to stay inside!"

Santini swore, and tried to push her aside. She screamed insanely and attacked him, kicking, scratching and biting, whining with every breath. Unnerved, he doubled up a fist and laid her out with a short right cross, then caught her as she wilted. He lowered her to the ground and started searching the box for a latch. He finally found one, and heaved the massive lid open.

The box was a sensory deprivation tank. Painted matte black inside, padded and sound-proofed, it isolated the occupant from all external stimuli. Stringfellow Hawke lay on the flotation mattress inside, his wrists and ankles bound to the corners with wide leather cuffs. Santini would have thought him dead but for the merry chirping of the heart monitor. There was a comparatively fresh bandage on his left leg, just above the knee, but bright blood was soaking through it.

"String?" Santini called gently. "String? Wake up, String... C'mon..." He shook his friend gently, but Hawke didn't respond. Then he ducked under the rim of the lid to remove the telemetry discs, and heard the woman's voice coming from a small speaker mounted on the wall of the tank.

"...destroyed everyone I ever loved. Can't you see that? You're a murderer. Can't you see that? You..."

Santini stared briefly at the speaker, frozen in utter horror. It took him only a moment to find the cassette player to which the speaker was attached. He turned it off and pocketed the tapes, then set about trying to wake his friend. Eventually, Hawke stirred weakly, curling on his left side, shivering.

"String... String, wake up. It's me, Dominic. C'mon, String... Wake up..."

Slowly, groggily, Hawke lifted his head. "Dom...?"

"Sure, it's me. C'mon. Let me help you out of this damned thing..."

Santini helped him sit up. Hawke was only partially conscious, and leaned on the frame, his head hanging.

Once he was sitting on the edge, Santini stood in front of him, smiling happily. "Much better. I don't suppose you can walk on that leg, can you?"

Hawke lifted his head slowly, and raised one hand to his face, rubbing at his eyes while he held on with the other hand. Then he blinked. "Dom...?"

Santini's breath caught. He hadn't heard the younger man whimper like that since the summer he turned six years old. "String? What's wrong?"

Hawke's head turned toward his godfather. His eyes were wide and glazed. "I can't see..." His free hand went out, reaching for support, and the older man caught him, put both hands on his shoulders, and steadied him. "Dom, I can't see..."

There was fear in the ragged whisper, and Santini understood it perfectly. Blind, all of Hawke's self-reliance was negated, all his skills made useless. Dom hugged him, and Hawke held on desperately.

"Hey, take it easy. You're in shock, String. Relax. I'm gonna take care of you, just like I always have. Let me get you back to Langley. The Firm's got the best doctors anywhere. They'll fix you up, good as new..."

"No!" Hawke ripped free of Santini's hold and clumsily grabbed the edge of the tank to keep from falling. "No... Not there..." He was trembling violently.

"String, it's okay..."

"They did this to me!" he cried, a note of hysteria audible in his voice.

"I damned near tripped over Charlene's body at the top of the stairs," Santini said thoughtfully. "Who's the blonde? The one I had to deck to get to you?"

Hawke was shaking, huddled into himself, but he heard the question. He swallowed hard. "Her name's Moffett..."

He stared. "She any relation...?"

"He was her father...and I killed him..."

Santini decided that was enough conversation; Hawke was shivering and pale, and definitely overwrought. He thought about the tapes he'd picked up, and resolved to listen to them as soon as he could. That reminded him of the POW bracelet, and he pressed it into the younger man's hand.

"Here. I guess you want this back."


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Hawke snatched at it. "Where was it?"

"Charlene had it. C'mon, String. Let's get out of here. Can you walk?"

He had calmed a little, and sat still, his left hand playing with the bracelet that once again rode his right wrist. He didn't answer.

Santini studied him, frowning worriedly, then pulled the radio from his pocket. "Caitlin?"

"Yes?"

"C'mon down. He's here."

"Is he okay?" she demanded. "I've been chewing my nails to the elbows up here, worryin'..."

"What should I tell her, String? Are you okay?"

But Hawke stared at some horror only he could see, still rubbing the bracelet, and didn't reply.

Santini took a deep breath. "Mostly, Caitlin, mostly. Just land in the yard. I'll help him out."

"All right. Three minutes."

"No hurry. He can't walk much. It'll be slow."

"Okay."

He turned the radio off and pocketed it. "C'mon, String, let's go. String...?"

"Huh?" Hawke looked up, his attention a bit off target. He stared blankly past Dom's shoulder, and Santini swallowed hard.

"C'mon, String," he repeated. "Caitlin's waiting topside." He slipped an arm around Hawke's shoulders. "Let's get out of here."

Hawke eased his weight off the edge of the tank, and would have fallen when his left leg buckled, but Dom was there, and held him. He fumbled for a hold, balancing awkwardly.

"Okay?"

"Yeah. Sure." He forced the words through set teeth.

"Okay. Here we go..."

It was a slow, awkward, painful trip. Hawke was panting hard by the time they got up the stairs, and Santini was about to call a halt when, without the least warning, the younger man collapsed.

"String!"

But Hawke was unconscious, pale, his skin cold and clammy, his breathing shallow.

"Classic shock," Santini muttered. He saw the now-soaked bandage, and swore. He could hear AIRWOLF idling just outside, and pulled out the radio again. "Caitlin? Bring the first aid kit. He just passed out."

She came running into the house with the kit, and hurried to Hawke's side. One thing became perfectly clear to both of them as she removed the bandage.

"This is a bullet wound, Dom," she said flatly. "No matter where we take him for treatment, the Firm will find him, because all bullet wounds have to be reported. What are we going to do? He has to go to a hospital. He's bleeding to death, and I can't stop it, or replace the blood he's already lost. He's deep in shock. We've got to do something fast."

"We're taking him to Langley."

"Right into the lion's jaws?" she demanded angrily.

"Sort of," he admitted. "But, better to go to them with a peace offering than make them come after us. Fix him up as best you can, Cait. I'll be right back." He went back down into the basement.

Caitlin rebandaged the wound, and when Santini returned, they carried Hawke's still-unconscious body out to AIRWOLF. They strapped him into the co-pilot's seat, and Caitlin took off while Santini called the Firm.

Archangel's face appeared on the monitor screen. "What do you want, Dominic?"

"I want to make a deal."

"Really? Details."

"I can give you a starting point for your investigation into the leak in your organisation that resulted in fourteen assassinations."

"Seventeen, as of noon today. What do you have?"

"Not for free, Michael. I need something from you."

"What do you want?"

"Medical treatment for String. Emergency."

Despite the present situation, Archangel had worked with Hawke for too long, and they had been through too much together, for the Deputy Director not to be concerned. "What happened to him?"

"You know he was captured out of the wrecked Angel..."

"Yes. And I can guess how you found out." He glared pointedly off-camera, and Santini could imagine Marella squirming.

"Well, I know who captured him, and I can tell you where to find them."

Archangel hadn't risen to his present position by being indecisive. "Very well."

"Your word, Michael."

The Deputy Director looked annoyed. "My word on it, then. I won't try to hold him, or you, or Caitlin, or AIRWOLF. And if the information is, indeed, conclusive, I'll apologise. Personally. Do you want me to swear to it?"

"Your word's enough, Michael. Thanks." Santini was relieved. "The leak was Charlene. You'll find her body, and that of a man I can't identify, in a farmhouse about forty-eight and a half miles from the wreckage of the Angel, on a heading of two-six-three."

"What the hell good to me are dead bodies?"

"I'm not finished, Michael," the veteran pilot chided. "String apparently killed them both while trying to escape, but the third one recaptured him."

"Really." Archangel steepled his fingers thoughtfully. "And who is this third conspirator?"

"Moffett's daughter." He gave that time to sink in, then explained further. "She's chained to the wall in a small room in the basement. It's where they held String, at least for a while. Your investigators will also find the sensory deprivation tank where I found him chained." He saw the look in Michael's eyes and continued, a vindictive edge to his voice. "There was a cassette player wired to speakers inside. I've got the tapes. From the numbers on them, he must've been locked in there for at least four hours. From his present condition, emotionally, I'd bet on twice that, or more."

"Why?"

"You'll know when you hear the tapes. Get a shock trauma team ready for us, will you? He took a bullet in the thigh, probably during the wreck, and near as I can tell, it's been bleeding fairly steadily ever since. He's out cold, in shock, and we can't wake him up."

"Don't try," Archangel ordered. "We'll be ready. What's your ETA?"

"Fifteen minutes. Thanks, Michael."

"You're welcome, Dominic."

* * * * *

The universe was dark and warm and silent, but for that hateful voice. She growled at him, her words flaying his soul, burning away all the shielding he had spent a lifetime building.

You killed my father. I hate you. You killed my lover. I hate you. You ruined my father's life. Can't you see that?

You've made my life nothing but grieving and revenge. Can't you see that?

How many other people's lives have you ruined as you've ruined mine? You've killed everyone I've loved. There's no one left. I'm alone now, and it's all your fault. Can't you see that?

You're guilty. Can't you see that?

Can't you see that?

"No...!" he protested. Leave me alone! I didn't do it to hurt you. I didn't even know you existed...

You murdered my father!

I had to kill him... Get out of my mind!

I'm alone now, and it's all your fault. Can't you see that?

"No..." Leave me alone...!

Santini frowned worriedly. Hawke was having another nightmare. He hadn't yet regained consciousness after the surgery that repaired his leg, but the nightmares came in a steady cycle. He twisted, fighting bonds he no longer wore, and the older man caught at his left arm, where the IV needle was inserted. He wished, very hard, that Hawke would wake up.

"It's all right, String... Take it easy..."

Hawke relaxed, and Santini sighed. It was over again, at least for a few minutes.

"How is he?"

He looked up, startled, and saw Archangel in the doorway, leaning heavily on his cane, looking years older than his true age.

"Still out. The blood they're giving him's helping, but other than that..." He shrugged. "I can't know 'til he wakes up. Something's wrong, for sure. He's having nightmares."

"I'm sorry, Dominic, for all of this. I didn't want to think he was guilty, but the evidence seemed so overwhelming..." He changed the direction of his speech abruptly. "Most of the Committee have always feared him, and they used this as an excuse. I couldn't have overruled them if I tried. Not that I tried..." He looked away. "The murders are continuing. Three more today."

Santini leaned back in his chair. "There have to be more people involved. We tracked a truck from the Angel to the house. It wasn't there when we found String. Somebody had to've driven it away."

Archangel nodded. "We have a psych team working on Pamela Moffett. They're making progress, except when somebody says something that reminds her of him." He nodded toward Hawke. "Then she gets hysterical, and it takes half an hour to divert her. She's crazier than her father. One thing's clear. What they did to Hawke wasn't their primary purpose. It was only a side-show, part of a larger plan. It seems to be a plot designed to physically destroy the Firm. They're killing us off faster than I can possibly recruit and train replacements."

"Foreign plot? Who could it be? Have you got any idea?"

"We aren't even sure it's a foreign plot," the Deputy Director admitted. "Pamela Moffett is a service brat, and it's pretty clear she would never voluntarily work for any foreign power

against the U.S. But she's irrational, and may not have been difficult to hoodwink. She seems to have been involved for purely personal reasons. She was in love with Charlene, and she wanted to get Hawke."

"She succeeded," Santini said quietly.

Archangel blinked. "She told the interrogators he was tougher than she expected. She'd been working on him for fourteen hours, and he hadn't started screaming..." His voice trailed off as he saw the look on the older man's face.

Dom forced the rage and fear he felt under control so he could speak. "That explains a lot..."

"What do you mean?"

He reached behind him and pulled a personal stereo off the bedside table. "He was chained down in that tank, with this as the only sensory input he had. Listen to it."

As the Deputy Director listened, his expression grew more and more grave. "He listened to this for fourteen hours...? My God...!"

Santini nodded as he took back the cassette player. "Three ninety-minute tapes, all pretty much the same. She repeats herself a lot, but that's the gist of it."

"Is he all right? You talked to him, didn't you?"

"I talked to him," Dominic agreed slowly. "He was groggy and disoriented..."

"I would imagine. Ms. Moffett described her procedures in lurid detail. She used a powerful hypnotic drug on him, as well as that."

"He was clear enough to blame you for the whole thing," Santini said bluntly. "He thinks the Firm was holding him. When I suggested bringing him back here to Langley for treatment, he damned near hit me."

Archangel's shoulders slumped a little more. "I...can't...really object to that accusation," he admitted quietly. "I should have known better than to suspect him..."

"I don't want him to know where he is," Santini said flatly. "He was very emphatic about not coming near you or the Firm. He recognized Charlene. Under those circumstances, who wouldn't've assumed she was working under your orders?"

"How can we keep it a secret? As soon as he wakes up, he'll know..."

"He's blind."

Archangel froze. "He's...<u>what</u>?"

"He's blind."

"But...how...?"

"You heard that tape. Nearly every accusation ends with, 'Can't you see that?' To deny the

statement meant he couldn't see 'that.' He couldn't see anything, Michael. No one alive knows him better than I do. She hurt him. It would've been kinder if he'd been gut-shot."

Michael dropped into a chair. "This will kill him, Dominic. Won't it?"

He shuddered. "Probably. Unless we can talk him out of it. I'm sure it's psychosomatic. If I can just get him to listen -- and believe..." He shook his head doubtfully.

Archangel stood up to leave. "Anything you want, Dominic, just call. If there's anything I can do to make amends for this...travesty..."

"Sure, Michael. I'll whistle," he replied scornfully as the other man left the room.

Just as the door closed, Hawke stirred, and Santini dismissed the Deputy Director from his mind. He watched the younger man fight his way free of the sedative's last clinging effects, a prayer caught in his throat. There was always the possibility the blindness was gone, had somehow been more directly linked in Hawke's mind with the drugs, the darkness, the droning voice of his actual captivity.

But when those blue eyes finally opened, they were glazed and unfocussed. No tentative, testing movements from Dominic elicited the slightest response. Nothing had changed.

Santini tapped Hawke's wrist just above the IV needle. "Hi, String. How do you feel?"

"Dom...?"

The muffled whimper was gone; Hawke obviously hadn't expected his vision to be miraculously restored. His fatalistic acceptance would be their primary obstacle. "Sure, it's me," Santini said gently. "How do you feel?"

Hawke turned his head toward the sound of the voice. "Tired," he murmured. "Very...tired..."

"Does your leg hurt?"

He frowned in groggy concentration. "No...not much. 'S it fixed?"

"All fixed. Everything's gonna be okay now. Caitlin's up at the Lair, polishing the Lady down. When she gets back, we're gonna take you home. 'Til then, you just take it easy, okay? Just go back to sleep."

"Sure, Dom." He lay still, but didn't relax.

"What's the matter?"

"Where are we? This is a hospital..."

"Damned straight, it is! You were three-quarters dead from loss of blood! The doc gave you three units of packed red blood cells, and this is your third unit of whole blood. You almost died..."

"Might've been better if I had..." Hawke murmured, finally relaxing and closing his eyes.

Santini grabbed his wrist in a vise-tight grip that startled him awake again. "I don't want to hear you talkin' like that!"

"What do you want me to say?" Hawke snapped back. "That it's all okay? That I don't mind?" His fury and pain brought him up off the pillow; he was braced on one arm, glaring sightlessly at where he knew his companion sat. "All I know how to do is fly, and kill..." The last word drained all his anger away as quickly as it had arisen, and he sagged back onto the pillow. "Damned..." he breathed in a queer, choked voice. Then he rolled up into a fetal ball, his back to Santini, cradling the wrist with the IV.

"String... String, listen to me..."

But Hawke refused to respond, ignoring him with such success that, despite Dominic's importuning, he fell asleep.

"String...?"

But Hawke was asleep. Santini sighed and stood up. There was nothing more he could do now.

* * * * *

The Firm's medics wanted to keep Hawke for observation, and Santini wanted to get him out and away as quickly as humanly possible, before he figured out where he was being treated, and by whom. Ultimately, they compromised.

The medics kept Hawke under medication for four days while they monitored the healing of his leg wound. While they had him where he couldn't protest, they gave him an exhaustive physical, and positively eliminated the possibility of any organic cause for his blindness.

Santini and Caitlin haunted the hospital wing of Firm headquarters at Langley. Archangel and Marella stayed away from any place where Stringfellow Hawke might so much as hear them.

On the third day, Hawke was asleep in his room, unaware that, on the other side of a sound-proofed window, he was being watched and discussed by Archangel, Dominic Santini, and the Firm's Chief Psychiatric Resident, Doctor Robert Fenelon.

"I've never had a more uncooperative patient," the doctor grumbled. "He doesn't talk. Sometimes, I wonder if he even hears me."

"Oh, he hears you," Archangel assured him. "If he was awake, I wouldn't even be here. He can hear right through that glass."

"That's sound-proofed!" the doctor exclaimed.

"Nevertheless."

"Can I take him home?" Santini interrupted. "His leg's healing real good..."

"I should keep him under psychiatric evaluation for at least another week..."

"Doc, you can't help him. He won't talk to you, and you don't understand him. I've known him all his life, and I'm the closest relative he has left. If he won't talk to me, there isn't

anyone else. He isn't going to let anyone else talk to him, and the longer he stays here, the greater the danger he'll find out where he is. I want him out of here!"

The doctor chewed his lip for a moment, then nodded slowly. "Yes, I suppose there are limits to what we can do for such a stubbornly uncooperative patient. But if you have any problems, you call us right away. All right?"

"That's a deal!" Santini beamed.

* * * * *

He took Hawke directly to the mountain cabin and, at least for the first day, managed to keep the younger man inside where he could keep an eye on him.

But here, in his own home, Hawke felt both more free and more aware of his handicap. He didn't need guidance -- he knew where everything was. But he felt the loss of sight more keenly.

The first morning, he paused on the landing on his way down for breakfast. He freed one wrist from the crutch-cuff and reached out a trembling hand to touch the carved wood of one of the picture frames hanging there. He could remember the painting it held -- but now, it was just anonymous lumps of long-dried oil paint under his questing fingers.

He felt a tearing sense of loss. The paintings had been part of his life for as long as he could remember. They were memories tied to his grandparents, both of whom had died when he was very young... He turned away abruptly, tripped over Tet -- who, typically dog-like, was standing attentively at heel -- and tried to catch himself, but missed the bannister and fell down the remaining stairs.

Santini heard him fall, and caught himself before he panicked and raced over to help. The last thing he's gonna want is me doin' a mother-hen imitation...

"String?" he called as casually as he could. "You all right?"

For one heart-stopping moment, there was no answer, and he considered panicking, after all. Then Hawke limped into sight. He eased himself carefully onto the couch, shook off the crutches, and used both hands to lift his injured leg up to rest on the cushion beside him.

"Leg bothering you?" Santini inquired with studied nonchalance.

"Yeah."

The older man nodded. He won't admit aloud to his handicap. All the better. It means he's still fighting that much, at least...

Neither of them spoke while Santini made breakfast. He brought Hawke a cup of coffee to keep him occupied until the omelets were ready.

Hawke sipped the hot coffee cautiously, warming his hands on the porcelain of the mug. Then he carefully set it aside, stood up, and limped slowly toward the door. He moved cautiously, making certain there were no obstacles in front of him before he risked a step, using his crutches to probe ahead surreptitiously.

Santini waited until he was nearly at the door; he was plainly going to go out. "String? Breakfast will be ready in a minute..."

Hawke neither paused nor turned. "I'm not hungry."

The older man swallowed his anxieties. "Take it easy on that leg then, okay?"

"Sure." He opened the door and went outside.

Santini fed one omelet to Tet, and ate the other one himself. He kept an ear cocked for any strange sounds from outside, and watched Tet, certain the dog would hear before he did if anything happened. When he finished cleaning the kitchen, he opened the door and looked out.

Hawke was nowhere to be seen. Santini slowly walked up the footpath that led to the blind -- How ironic that word sounds! -- from which Hawke kept tabs on the small herd of mule deer that lived on his mountainside. Occasionally, he glanced skyward, peering through the trees for the eagle who always seemed to be nearby whenever Hawke was home. But the great raptor was nowhere to be seen.

He tried hard not to think about what he might have to decide if Hawke weren't in the flimsy little shelter halfway up the mountain. The path was clear and gentle; there was no physical reason why Hawke couldn't have made it up there, even blind and on crutches. But if he wasn't there, there were very few other places he could be.

Santini's fears were groundless. When he reached the end of the path and faced the sunlit clearing, he could hear Hawke's voice coming from inside the wooden shanty.

He was too far away to make out any words, and considered sneaking a bit closer. But Hawke's frighteningly acute hearing had been sharpened still further by the elimination of the distraction of sight, and the older man had no wish to be detected; his godson wouldn't take kindly to being spied upon. So he stayed where he was, and strained to hear the conversation in the blind.

For conversation was what he heard. Hawke was talking to someone, and listening to replies, although Santini couldn't hear the other voice.

Now, who could be up here? The only way in is by air -- helicopter or small seaplane... And I would've noticed another aircraft... He shuddered, remembering what the doctor had told him. Maybe he really is alone. Maybe he's just flipped, lost it completely. God knows that girl was trying hard enough to drive him insane... Maybe she succeeded. Who could be up here? And who would he talk to when he won't talk to me...?

That hurt. Dominic Santini had raised the Hawke brothers after their parents were killed, and he'd been insufferably proud when they out-performed him at everything. They were better pilots, handsomer, braver... All their lives, he had been their confidant. After Saint John was lost, String had no one else, and if he spoke at all of his inner feelings, it was to Dominic Santini.

He understood Hawke's occasional references to being "damned"; they were nothing new to him. String had contemplated the concept of personal damnation for years; the way people he loved died all around him, repeatedly leaving him bereft and alone, had quickly assumed the appearance of demonic harassment.

But now, Hawke refused to cooperate with or confide in his godfather. Santini took a deep,

steadying breath.

I don't care who he's talking to, he decided. If whoever it is can help him beat this, it's okay by me. It doesn't matter who does it, but it's got to be done -- and soon...!

The conversation was still going on, and he didn't want to be caught, so he turned and retraced his steps to the cabin.

By the time Hawke returned, it was late afternoon, and the sun was sloping rapidly toward the jagged western horizon; sunset came quickly in the mountains. He looked thoroughly drained.

Santini met him at the cabin door. "I hope you had enough sense not to be walking around all day on a perforated leg..."

Hawke stopped, leaned on his crutches to take his weight off the leg, and lifted his sightless gaze toward Dominic. His stare was as direct and unblinking as ever; only the unfocussed glassiness of his eyes made it at all different. He seemed to be trying to decide something. After a few moments of silent tension, he limped past Santini as if the older man didn't exist.

"String...?"

But there was no answer.

* * * * *

Down the mountain, back in the real world, Firm agents were dying at the rate of between two and five a day. Not all of them were assassinated by the black helicopter, and Marella had to revise her figures to include all suspicious accidents and sudden but apparently natural deaths. The body count mounted toward one hundred.

From the Committee's office in Washington came an Olympian order from Zeus, ordering all Committee members to the safety of the Sanctuary, there to wait out the crisis in safety.

Predictably, Michael Coldsmith-Briggs III delayed obeying as long as he could, to supervise those field agents who couldn't retreat. But Zeus's orders became more and more strident, and finally, reluctantly, he went. The strategic retreat felt more like cowering in a hole, and it irritated him.

Limited to burst transmissions to a satellite at carefully randomized times, communications were extremely curtailed. For lack of much else to do, Marella started to consider ways to remedy that in the future.

* * * * *

After three days at the lake, Santini was a wreck. As far as he could tell, Hawke hadn't eaten at all, and averaged two syllables a day of conversation with him, although he spent most of every day in the deer blind, talking with the stranger his godfather still hadn't seen. When Dominic tried to get him to talk, Hawke ignored him.

On the second day, at sunset, Hawke tried to lay a few logs on the fire. The first clue that anything was wrong came when Santini heard a muffled clatter and a pain-filled curse. He looked across the room and saw Hawke sitting in an awkward sprawl on the raised hearth, his crutches

fallen out of reach, cradling his left hand against his body in unmistakable pain.

"String...?" He hurried to the younger man's side, and gently forced the injured hand out where he could see it properly. "You sit there for a minute." He went to the fridge, and returned with a bottle of aloe vera gel, which he spread liberally on the burn. As the icy gel anesthetized it, Hawke relaxed a little, but didn't speak.

"You're shaking, kid," Santini observed gently as he handed Hawke his crutches. "Go get some sleep. You'll feel better in the morning."

Hawke went upstairs, but sleep wouldn't come. He lay in his darkness, in the silence, knowing morning would bring no relief from the nightmare he endured.

After sunset the next day, he went to the wine rack and thoughtfully selected a bottle. Santini approved cautiously. His self-control was iron-clad, but maybe, with a slight addition of alcohol, he would loosen up a little, and talk. He hoped so.

Hawke opened the bottle without help. But when he poured the wine, he abruptly snarled something Santini didn't understand, and smashed the bottle to the floor. The red splatter revealed the problem; Hawke didn't like burgundy, and kept it only for company. He had miscalculated his choice of bottles, and the mistake infuriated him.

"Hey, String..."

"Leave me alone!" he snarled with unusual anger. "I'm all right!"

Santini stood up and walked over to the bar. "No, you're not, kid, and you'd better start facing up to it."

Hawke fumbled for his crutches and stumbled away. The older man watched him, making no move to either help or hinder. Once he had established some distance between them, Santini spoke again.

"You can't run away from me, String."

He stopped. "Dom..."

"There's nothing physically wrong with your eyes. You could see again if you wanted to."

"If I <u>wanted</u> to?" He straightened to his full height, letting the crutches dangle. "Do you think I'm enjoying this?"

"No," he admitted. "But you've got to start working yourself out of it. <u>You.</u> You're the only one who can control the way you think."

There was a long silence. Then Santini heard Hawke inhale raggedly. "I can't do it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Don't you think I've been trying?" the younger man asked bitterly. "I can't. Everything's dark..."

"You were in that tank, locked away in the dark, for fourteen hours. It must have felt like an

eternity or two..."

Hawke half-turned toward him, frowning in confusion. "Tank? What tank? What are you talking about?"

"The sensory deprivation tank I found you in," he explained, feeling a surge of excitement. Maybe this is the key! He has no memory of what was done to him. At least, no conscious memory of it... "Pamela Moffett said she put you in there after you killed Charlene."

"After I...?" Hawke's voice trailed off. "When did she tell you all this?"

"Oh, she never talked to me," Santini said cheerfully. "She tried to claw me to pieces until I popped her one. Doctor Fenelon was doing the interrogation..." His voice faded as he realized what he'd said.

Hawke stiffened at the mention of the psychiatrist's name. "You took me to Langley..." he accused.

"You were dying! You'd been shot, and you were bleeding to death. Any hospital would've had to report the bullet wound, and the Firm would've found you anyway. We needed Michael's help!"

"He set me up! He fed me to those vultures so Zeus would get off his case!"

"Charlene set you up, String!" Santini contradicted. "Michael had nothing to do with it."

But Hawke had turned his back on Dominic, and headed out the door.

"String, listen to me! I can explain it all..."

The younger man didn't pause, but threw one last sentence over his shoulder. "And I trusted you...!"

The scathing bitterness in those four words froze Santini in his tracks. He watched, helpless, as Hawke manoeuvred painfully up the path to the deer blind. Once he was out of sight, the older man disconsolately went back into the cabin. Numbly, wondering if String would ever talk to him again, he built up the fire and dropped onto the couch. He sat and stared at the flames, determined to stay up until Hawke came back. Maybe if we fight it out...

As the fire burned down to ashes, he suddenly realized it was almost dawn -- his watch said so, although he couldn't yet see any appreciable lightening of the sky. He had been sitting there all night, mentally kicking himself for the inept way he'd handled the problem -- and Hawke had been out in the woods all night, alone, half-crippled and blind...

Sure, he thought nervously as he shrugged into his coat. It's no darker at midnight than at noon for him, but still... He opened the door to the cabin, and froze at what he saw.

Outside, the lake's rocky shoreline merged into a long sandspit that eventually sank into the icy waters to form a shoal. Hawke's crutches lay abandoned in the coarse sand.

Out at the very end of the sandspit, already knee-deep in water, walking slowly out into the blackness of the lake, was Stringfellow Hawke.

Santini opened his mouth to yell, but he was frozen with fear and shock. He had never really believed Hawke would kill himself. Both Doctor Fenelon and Archangel had mentioned the possibility, but he himself hadn't really considered it likely. Yet, even as he watched, Hawke took another step out from the safety of the shore.

"So," a stranger's voice said clearly. "You are giving up the fight?"

Santini was startled. Is this the man String's been meeting up at the deer blind...? He thought he could make out a dim figure on the shore, at the very edge of the trees, and hurried that way. He was near enough to see Hawke stiffen at the sound of the quiet question, and he heard the flat tones of his reply.

"Hasn't this gone on long enough?" he asked numbly. "I'm no use to anyone like this..."

"So you will follow your parents out into the lake? Your parents are not here. You cannot find them like this."

Hawke's shoulders slumped. "Can't I ever have any peace?" he pleaded. "All I've ever had is pain, and I'm sick to the soul with it. Let it end here..."

"It will not end here," the stranger stated. "You will leave Dominic a lifelong burden of guilt. He will blame himself that he did not stop you, that he failed you. You know this."

Santini swallowed the lump in his throat. It's the truth...

"Dom understands me better than anyone. He'll understand this."

Yeah... I'll understand, he thought miserably. But that won't stop the pain. Oh, God, String...

"And what about Saint John?" the stranger inquired. "The Firm will not seek him any longer if you do not spur them on."

Hawke straightened a little. "Saint John's been dead for fourteen years," he said, choking out the words he had never before spoken aloud. "I've always known that. I just didn't want to accept it." He took another deliberate step away from the shore.

"String!" His name burst from Santini's throat. "You gonna just leave me alone like this? You're the only family I've got left..."

He stopped walking, and clenched his fists. "Dom...let me go..."

"String, please... You're the son I never had..."

"Then let me go!" It was a cry of pain. "Please, Dom..."

"I can't! Suicide's a mortal sin!"

He heard a bitter laugh. "Hell can't be worse than living like this."

"String, Hell's for eternity!"

"Our hells are of our own creation," the stranger interrupted. "We live them out here." He

abruptly shifted from the spoken word to song, and the guitar he held crooned accompaniment.

Our lives are brief as falling stars
That streak the sky like tears.
My life is stretched like a slender thread
Across a million years.

The Weaver of Dreams has spun our lives,
Our webs of joy and pain.
She casts them forth for a little while,
And gathers them in again.

Although 'til now my thread was drawn
In solitary ways,
I think your dreams weave through my nights...
Your mem'ries through my days.

Hawke turned slightly toward the shore, toward the Singer, and Santini caught his breath. The younger man was crying, his face wet with tears, his expression naked and unshielded for the first time in more years than Dominic could recall. He couldn't breathe, but just watched, and prayed.

Life's tangled skein takes shape upon
The loom of what will be;
Our lives entwine in the warp and weft
Of the Weaver's tapestry.

For there is a pattern, vast as Time,
The stars weave 'round the Earth --
Where smaller rhythms weave our years
The promise of rebirth.

And when the Weaver draws our threads across
Another Where and When,
I shall meet, and know, and remember...
And love you once again.

The sun's first rays broke the darkness over them, drawing their attention upward, and they heard the harsh scream of the eagle high overhead. She came diving at them out of the day's first pale light, skimming close in front of Hawke before swooping up to regain her preferred heights. Santini gasped in awe.

Hawke watched the eagle. When she vanished into the morning mists, his gaze lowered, and he bent to retrieve a fallen feather that floated before him. He stood still for a moment, smoothing its perfect whiteness between his fingers. Then, slowly, he turned toward the shore, his eyes touching Dominic, then going on, seeking the Singer. Tears still ran down his face. Santini looked that way, too.

In the lemon-coloured sunlight, they both saw a young man not twenty years old, dressed in nondescript pants and shirt, holding a battered guitar. His eyes were deep blue, and his hair was the same shade of deep gold that String's had been at that age. Hawke frowned, puzzled by the stranger's oddly familiar appearance. He automatically glanced at Santini for another

opinion.

The older man met his look with a shrug, although his heart was singing within him. They both looked back -- but the Singer was gone.

Hawke blinked, suddenly conscious of what had happened. He swayed dizzily as a wave of previously obscured memories swept over him -- the first interrogation he'd undergone; the conversation he'd overheard when they believed him still unconscious; the words that, in his anger at Michael, he had interpreted incorrectly. Without really noticing what he did, he limped out of the water toward Dominic, still holding the feather.

Santini met him halfway, and they shared a fervent embrace. When they stepped apart, Hawke dried his face with his sleeve, and smiled through his tears. "Thanks, Dom."

"I didn't do anything." Santini disclaimed all responsibility -- and, with it, all credit. "It was that kid with the guitar."

"You were here," his godson replied quietly.

"Who was that guy, anyway? You've spent every day up at the deer blind with him, haven't you?"

The younger man's expression tightened a little, but only for a moment. "Mother Santini," he said softly.

"Yeah, well, I've been worryin' about you for nearly thirty-five years. It's too late to stop now."

Hawke's smile faded to a frown as he started thinking about what he remembered. "Dom, I've lost track... What day is today?"

"Saturday."

"The date?" I hope I'm wrong...

"The fifteenth. What is it?"

He swallowed a choking lump of guilt and fear. "Dom, you meant what you said about Michael being on our side, didn't you? Charlene turned?"

He nodded. "Sure, I meant it. I didn't think you were listening, though."

"I always hear you, Dom, you know that. Listen. They're going to hit the Sanctuary today. Michael's there, isn't he?"

Santini looked grim. "The entire Committee's there. Zeus's orders. They aren't safe anywhere else."

"They aren't safe there. Charlene betrayed the Sanctuary. C'mon!" He turned, heading for the landing pad and the Santini Air chopper that sat there.

Dominic caught at his arm. "You're in no shape for combat!"

Hawke shook off the restraint. "I'm a lot more fit than I was an hour ago."

Santini backed off a little. "Can you fly with that leg?"

"I'll have to, won't I?"

"Well, let's pamper it 'til the last second. Just stand there, hmm?" He trotted up the beach and fetched back the crutches Hawke had abandoned.

Waiting, left alone on the sandspit, watching the new sun being reborn over the mountains, Stringfellow Hawke lifted his eyes past the ragged horizon to the blue sky, watching the eagle playing on a thermal, so high she was only a coffee-brown speck against the blueness. The beauty, the fresh cleanness -- and the very fact that he could see it -- brought back the tears. He brushed them aside and turned a more cheerful countenance to Dominic when he returned.

"Thanks, Dom."

"They may be annoying, but I'll bet they make it a lot easier to get around."

Ten minutes later, they were airborne.

* * * * *

"Sir, I wish you would go below..."

Archangel leaned back in his chair. His leg ached; he had been running around too much the last few days. He watched a roadrunner pick its way across the detailed mosaic of the otherwise empty courtyard.

"Zeus ordered me to report to the Sanctuary," he responded at last. "But I'm in command here until he shows up, so..."

"All the more reason you should be in the shelter!" Marella insisted.

"Why are you so anxious to consign me to a sub-basement on such a lovely day?"

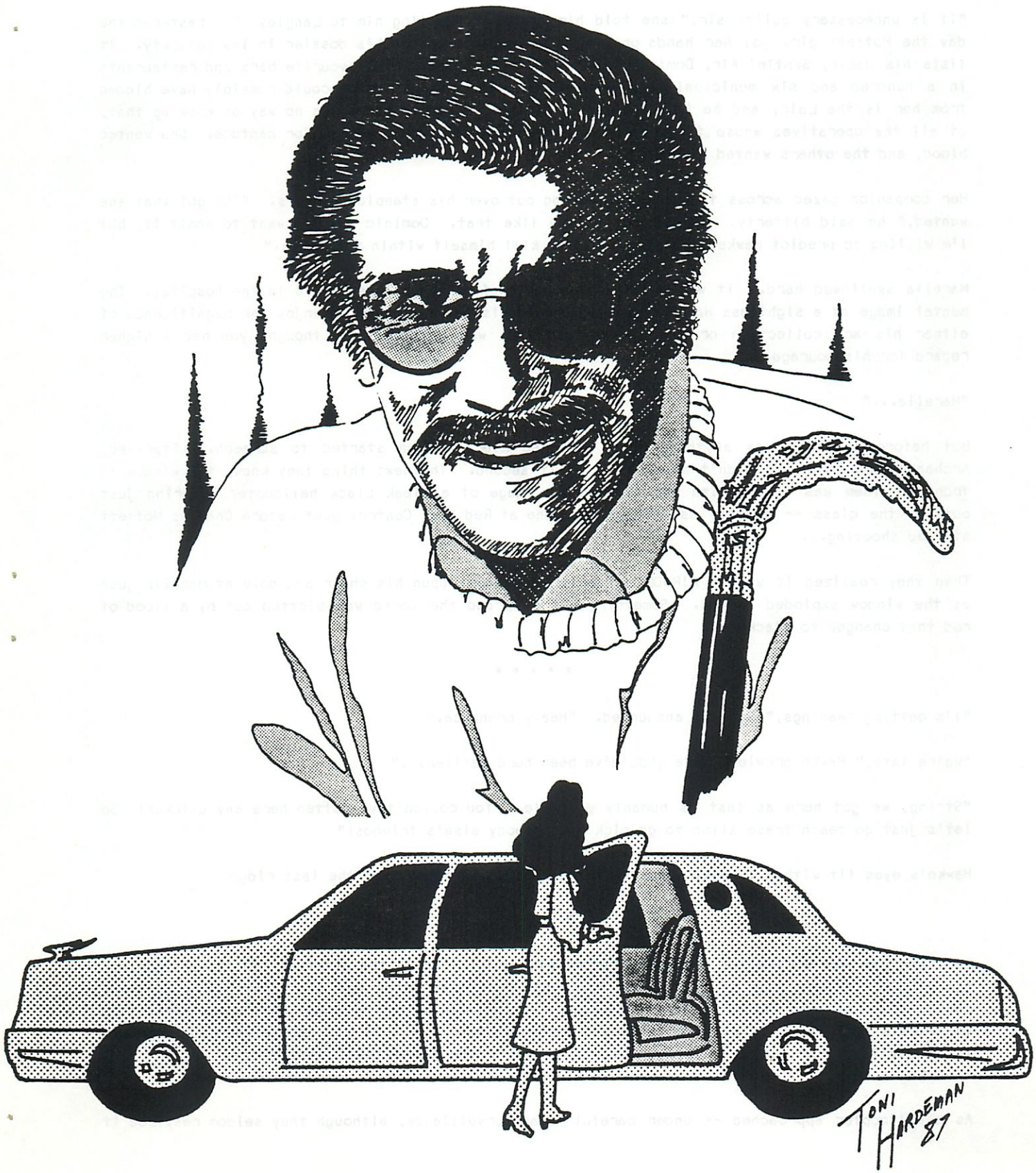
"I just received the final interrogation reports on Pamela Moffett," she replied. "Ms. Moffett was firmly convinced that her small group of conspirators were planning to erase the entire Committee, after they had softened us up by eliminating a sizable percentage of our field agents. We have to assume Charlene betrayed the Sanctuary. They are going to attack us here. Perhaps not today," she conceded. "But surely within the week. And we cannot risk losing you."

"Why, Marella, I'm touched."

She took a deep breath and tried again. "Sir..."

"Marella." His voice was softer. "I know what you're saying. But not just yet, please? It's too lovely a day..."

She sighed. "Yes, sir. You'd rather stare out over the desert, and feel guilty about what happened to Hawke."


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He flinched. "That was a low blow."

"It is unnecessary guilt, sir," she told him flatly. "Calling him to Langley only hastened the day the Moffett girl got her hands on him. Charlene had copied his dossier in its entirety. It lists his cabin, Santini Air, Dom's home, Caitlin's apartment, his favourite bars and restaurants in a hundred and six municipalities world-wide. The only place he could possibly have hidden from her is the Lair, and he is not given to hiding. Besides, there was no way of knowing that, of all the operatives whose files were compromised, he alone was marked for capture. She wanted blood, and the others wanted AIRWOLF."

Her companion gazed across the desert, looking out over his steepled fingers. "She got what she wanted," he said bitterly. "Hawke can't live like that. Dominic doesn't want to admit it, but I'm willing to predict Hawke will find a way to kill himself within the month."

Marella swallowed hard. It was difficult enough to face the blinded Hawke in the hospital. The mental image of a sightless Hawke stumbling around his cabin, unable to enjoy the magnificence of either his art collection or the scenery outside, was painful. "I thought you had a higher regard for his courage..."

"Marella..."

But before he could say anything else, the Red Alert klaxon started to screech. Startled, Archangel and his aide didn't move for a split second. The next thing they knew, the window in front of them was filled with the nightmarish image of a sleek black helicopter hovering just outside the glass -- exactly as AIRWOLF had done at Red Star Control just before Charles Moffett started shooting...

Then they realized it wasn't AIRWOLF at all. Archangel spun his chair and dove at Marella just as the window exploded inward. Something hit him, and the world was blotted out by a flood of red that changed to blackness.

* * * * *

"I'm getting readings," Santini announced. "Heavy ordnance."

"We're late," Hawke growled. "We should've been here earlier..."

"String, we got here as fast as humanly possible. You couldn't've gotten here any quicker! So let's just go teach these slime to go pick on somebody else's friends!"

Hawke's eyes lit with a savage, unholy glee as AIRWOLF screamed over the last ridge.

* * * * *

Back when he had worked for the Firm, before his resignation in the midst of the final stages of the AIRWOLF project, one of the things Hawke had done most often was fly guests, Congressional representatives, and defectors to the Sanctuary for briefings, debriefings, and demonstrations of the Firm's worthiness to receive continued appropriations. Few of the people who had ever been there realized the sumptuous structure was actually the Committee's last retreat in case of disaster.

As a helicopter approached -- under careful radar surveillance, although they seldom realized it

-- the first impression anyone had was of a spacious home designed for the location by some multi-millionaire interested in experimental soft technologies. The house itself was set into the side of a bluff, facing south. Its wide, gently curving wings matched and complemented the original shape of the bluff, and enclosed a large courtyard ringed with native plants. The courtyard floor was a fine mosaic, with a large fountain in its centre -- a Calderesque modern structure that hid the radar dish. The entire layout was modern and trendy-looking, and easily could have graced the pages of any high-tech or gracious-living magazine. No comfort had been skimped.

But it was all a facade.

Farther underground were thick concrete barriers covered with armour plating, a bomb-proof shelter pierced by several lift shafts. The lifts themselves were armoured. Emergency procedures recommended that, in crisis situations, most personnel remain below, in the bunker. Only as many people as could fit into the lifts in one trip were permitted above the security barrier.

AIRWOLF screamed into battle above the Sanctuary, all her guns blazing. Six armed Cobras bombarding the site scattered as she appeared out of nowhere. Two were destroyed before they had time to realize they were under attack. AIRWOLF skimmed over the burning wreckage of the Sanctuary, wheeled, and came nose to nose with her own twin.

"That must be the ship that made Michael suspect us!" Santini exclaimed excitedly.

Hawke tapped his transmitter once. "En garde." He pulled AIRWOLF up and looped back, intentionally ignoring the twin in favour of the surviving Cobras.

The battle was brief. The Cobras stood no chance against Hawke and AIRWOLF, and were swiftly eliminated. Only then did he turn his attention back to his final foe.

"He's running, String!" Santini yelped gleefully. "Eastbound, as fast as his little feet will carry him. I think he's scared."

"Put a FALCON on line," Hawke said quietly.

"You could catch him..."

"I said, bring up a FALCON."

Mildly affronted by the tone of command, Santini's response was a bit more sarcastic than he'd intended. "Yes, sir!"

Hawke didn't react visibly.

"FALCON on line."

The pilot didn't acknowledge verbally, but the targeting visor came down, hiding his face. Santini heard the missile launch.

Within a few seconds, there was a new but short-lived sun on the eastern horizon.

"I'm not picking up any transmissions of any kind," Dominic reported uneasily. "This can't be all of the place... It's got a bomb shelter, doesn't it?"

"That's what most of it is. This house is just the top few levels," Hawke replied as he brought AIRWOLF in for a landing. "Anybody in the house? I don't think our sensors can penetrate the bunker."

"Lots of bodies," the older man reported grimly. "At least ten. But I've got survivors, too. A dozen or so to the west, and two off by themselves, in a small room overlooking the courtyard."

The attack had leveled the fountain. Hawke landed AIRWOLF alongside the wet wreckage, and awkwardly climbed out. He reached back inside for his crutches, then limped painfully toward the building. Puzzled, but not inclined to argue, Santini followed him.

Manoeuvring through the rubble with some difficulty, Hawke nonetheless knew where he was going. He found Archangel's office an utter shambles, the ceiling half-fallen, the carpet smoking, the furniture splintered.

"Michael? Marella?" He started into the room, pushing debris away as he hesitantly ventured inside. "Michael? Answer me!"

There was no sound, no hint of an answer, but suddenly Hawke saw the Deputy Director -- a filthy, bedraggled figure seated on the floor, leaning against what had once been a desk. He cradled Marella's motionless, blood-soaked body in his arms.

"Michael..." His voice was soft as he leaned against the wall to take some of the weight off his leg. "Michael, are you all right?"

Dazed, Archangel looked up, and blinked in confusion. "Hawke...?"

"Yes, I'm fine now," the pilot said distinctly. "Are you?"

He took a deep breath. "I suppose..."

The younger man steeled himself, and asked, "What about Marella?"

"She's alive..."

Hawke closed his eyes in relief; he couldn't imagine Michael coping without Marella. "Dom..." He didn't turn; he had already heard Santini walk up behind him. "Can you get us a medic and a couple of stretcher-bearers?"

"I'll do my damnedest," he promised, and was gone.

Archangel looked up at Hawke. "You came here...? After what I did to you...?"

Hawke was surprised at the pain in the older man's voice. "You didn't do anything but your job," he said softly. "It had almost nothing to do with you, really..."

"Almost...!"

"Michael...if I'd been able to remember everything, I would never have blamed you. But I didn't, until dawn today."

Understanding flooded Archangel's expression. "Rough week...?"

Hawke nodded slowly. But before he could say anything else, Marella stirred, blinked her eyes open, and smiled weakly at her superior. "I'm glad you're all right," she whispered.

"Are you hurt badly?" he asked anxiously.

She sighed. "I don't really think so. But then, I didn't think so the last time, either..."

"Dom's gone for a medic," Hawke said. "You just relax."

She turned her head at the sound of his voice, and smiled again as she realized that he, too, was all right. Then she slowly went limp in Archangel's arms.

"Marella? Marella!"

Hawke held his breath. He had enough trouble coping with his own emotions; he was sure he could never cope with Michael's, especially since the older man so seldom seemed to have any.

But Archangel found a pulse in her throat -- thready and fast, but undeniably present -- and relaxed. "She's just unconscious..." He heard a sigh of relief from Hawke, and their eyes met in a rare moment of perfect understanding.

* * * * *

"It is apparent," Archangel said slowly, "that they were assassinating our agents for two reasons. The first was to weaken our resources and lower our morale; the second was to force the Committee to withdraw to the Sanctuary, where they could be sure of having all or most of us within fairly easy reach. It nearly worked." He was standing by the fireplace in Hawke's living room.

Marella sat in an easy chair, her ribs taped, her arm in a sling, looking worn and tired. "The people in the bunker were safe. The only ones actually in danger were those upstairs in the public areas."

The Deputy Director gave her a guilty look, but she smiled and turned her attention to Hawke, who sat alone at one end of the couch, sipping a glass of wine. He held an old photo album in his lap, and seemed to be ignoring them all.

"At least we can be sure, or reasonably so, that there is no one still running around loose who knows anything about the Sanctuary, or any of the other information Charlene stole," Archangel concluded with audible relief. "They're all dead -- thanks to you, Hawke."

"Oh, I dunno," Santini interrupted from the kitchen. "What about the kid, String? How much did you tell him? He seemed to know what was going on..."

Hawke looked up, and the older man saw annoyance in his eyes. He shrugged apologetically, but wasn't sorry he had spoken. He knew if he'd asked privately, he would never have gotten an answer.

"Kid? What kid? How much does he know?" Archangel demanded. "Dammit, Hawke..."

"Michael." It was a command, and he subsided. "He doesn't know anything significant about the Firm."

"Then what did you talk about for three days?" Santini brought in a large pitcher of iced tea. "Cello versus guitar?"

"Three days?" The Deputy Director looked from one man to the other, startled. "There's somebody else up here? Where? This is the only structure for fifty miles in any direction!"

"He was just passing through," Hawke said off-handedly. "We talked about me, mostly. And my family." He stood up and went to stare out the window across the lake. "He helped me see again."

"A chance-passing hiker?" Archangel demanded in disbelief. "You're straining my credulity, Hawke. Who was he?"

Santini sat down in the middle of the couch next to Caitlin, who sipped her tea and watched Hawke. He glanced down at the fragile old photo album Hawke had set aside so carefully, and his breath caught.

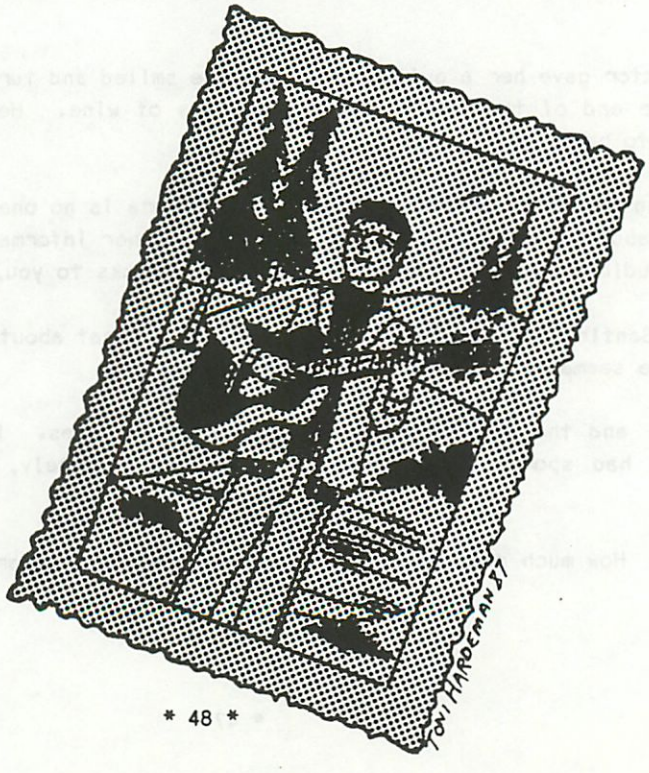
There was an old, yellowed photograph, with an equally old, faded label affixed beside it. In faded ink and antique script, it read:

Thomas Fallon Hawke
1899 to 1917
died in France, 4 August
son Kenneth Torrey born 21 September

The photo was of the Singer as they had last seen him -- smiling, holding his guitar, standing on a beach with pines behind him.

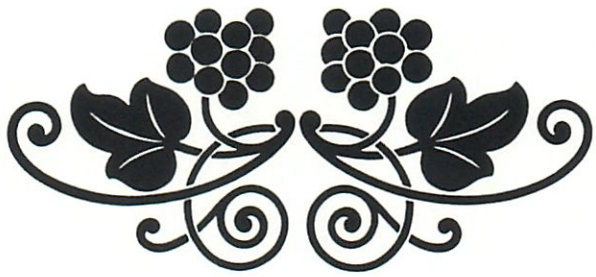
Hawke's grandfather.

"I don't know his name," Hawke said from the window, his back to them all. "I never asked him."



STAR WARS:

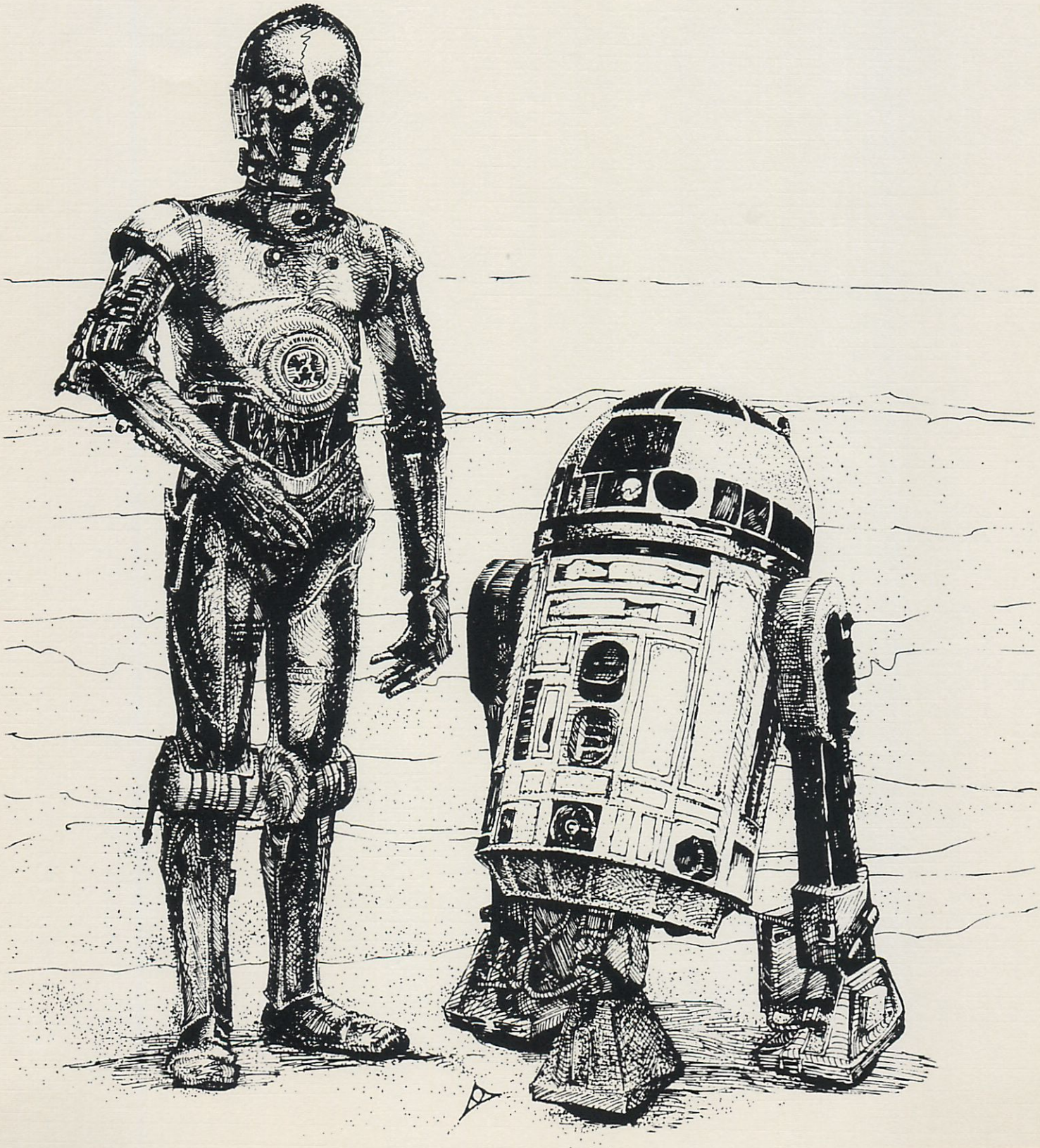
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BY

joan hanke-woods



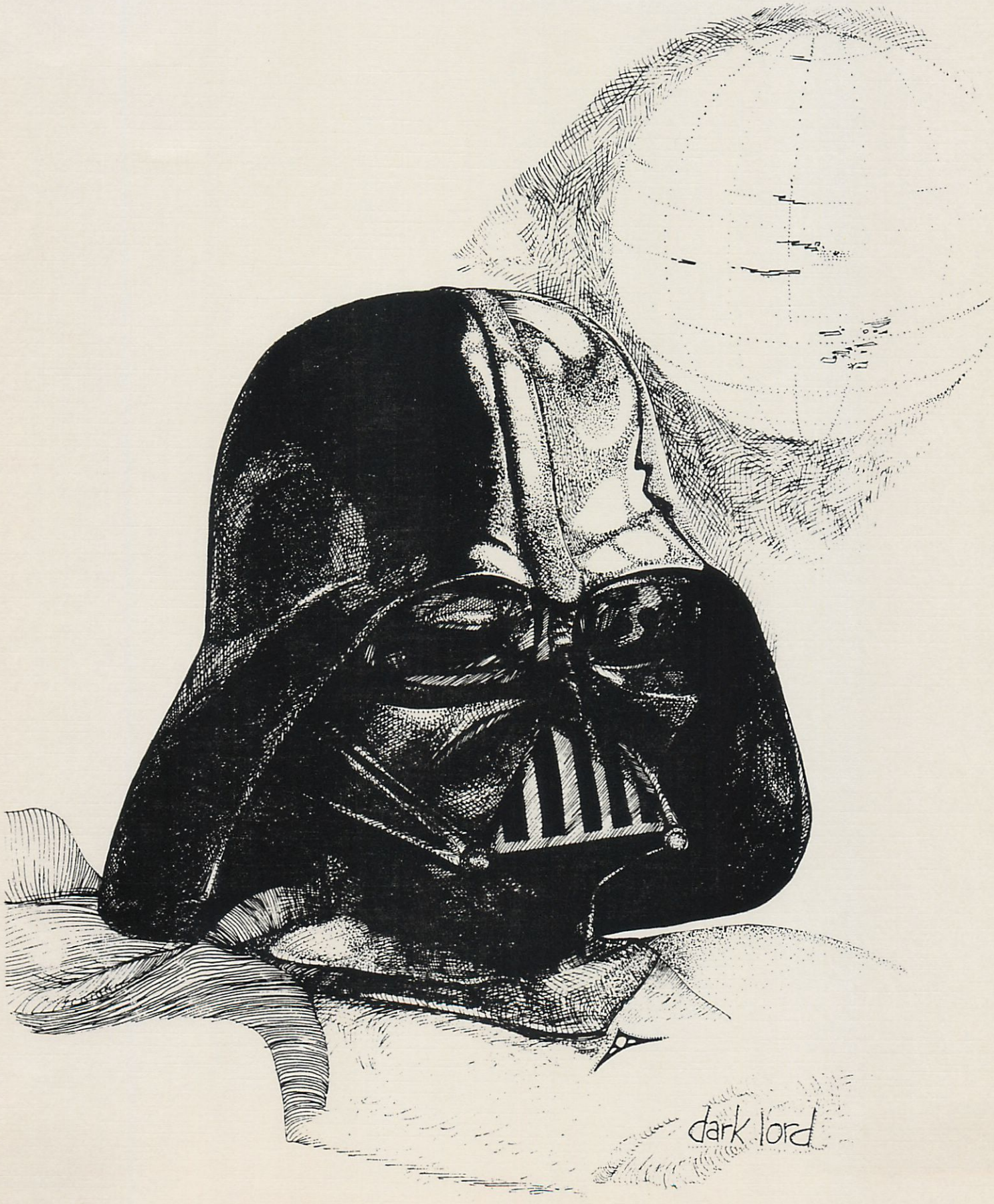


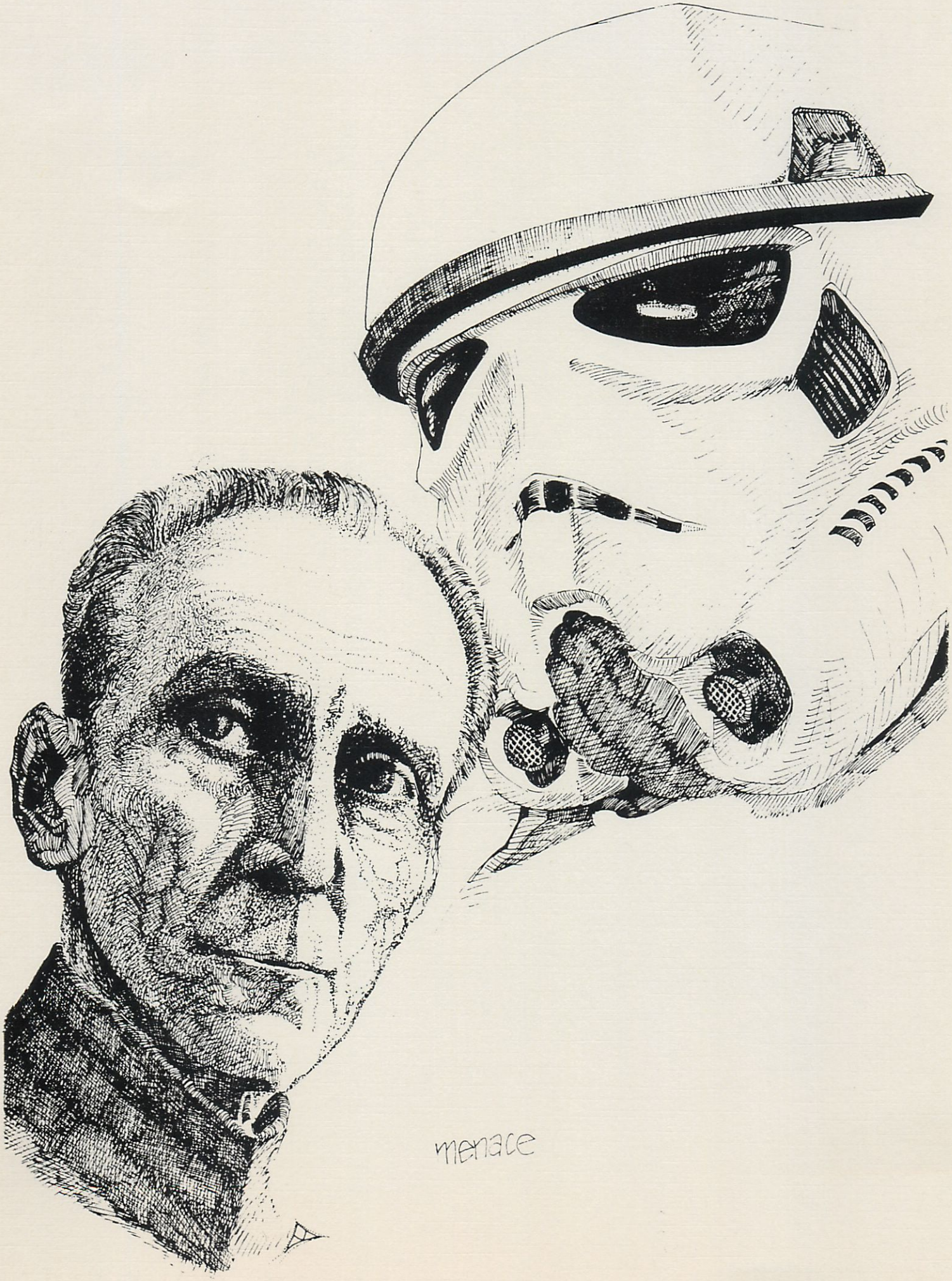
motherless...
...and a long way from home


burned
out


©1977
ego
and
alter


. . . to see . . .


dark lord


menace

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

(By Mary Robertson)

A little girl, all of six or seven years old, watched wide-eyed as Ralph Hinckley completed one of his less inspired landings atop the remnants of what, moments before, had been a Christmas tree.

Feeling his face grow as red as the tights he wore, Ralph scanned the immediate vicinity for FBI agent Bill Maxwell. There was no sign of his friend, but his audience of one was still there. Gingerly, he extricated himself from the broken greenery and sherds of glass that littered the sidewalk, and rose to meet her curious gaze.

They stared at each other in silence for a moment before Ralph gave up and asked, "What's the matter?"

"I didn't know angels wore Superman suits." She seemed more taken by his attire -- red leotard and cape -- than by his unusual means of transportation. His flying didn't seem to bother her at all.

"They don't, honey," he hastened to reassure her.

"You do."

The conversation was proving a bit embarrassing, not to mention more than a little awkward. Where are her parents, anyway? "I'm not an angel. I'm a teacher."

"You are an angel!" She stamped her booted foot in frustration. Ralph knew how she felt. "You have to be an angel. You fly. Only birds and airplanes and angels do that."

Well, at least she didn't classify me as a bird or, worse yet, an airplane...

"Where are your wings, Angel? Are they invisible?"

With a sigh, he tried again. "I do not have any wings."

"Oh." Her face fell, but she brightened again as she remembered something. "I know! You have to do a good deed and earn them, right? Like Clarence?"

Clarence? Ralph stared at her, completely puzzled, until she explained.

"I saw it on TV. There was this movie. It had won...wonderful something in the name." Stumbling a little over the unfamiliar word, she frowned at his obtuseness. Surely, angels knew about TV!

Ralph nodded, suddenly understanding. She's talking about that old Jimmy Stewart movie they run every year, "It's a Wonderful Life." The angel's name in that is Clarence...

Just then, he spotted Maxwell out of the corner of his eye; his friend was dashing through the parking lot across the street. "I'd like to stay and talk," he told the little girl hastily. "But someone needs my help. I have to go. You be a good girl, and find your mommy, okay? Merry Christmas!" Flashing her a distracted smile, he vanished.

"Merry Christmas, Angel!"

"There you are!" a harried young woman scolded, coming up behind the little girl. "I've been looking all over for you! Don't you ever run off like that again, or I'll..."

* * * * *

It was the Saturday before Christmas, when the high school Home Ec Department ran their annual Christmas party/baby-sitting service. The all-afternoon affair gave frustrated parents a place to leave their children while they completed their last-minute shopping. More importantly for some people, it insured good grades for the students who took on the responsibility each year. Every available body, teacher and student alike, was pressed into service for the occasion.

Every available body.

"I don't even like kids," Bill Maxwell growled as he surveyed the controlled hysteria in the gymnasium.

"They're no worse than your 'Commies,' Bill," Pam Davidson, Ralph's fiancee, couldn't resist pointing out. The FBI agent was always needling her about something. Although she was a competent attorney, he didn't seem to think she could even make a cup of coffee. "Besides, you owe Ralph after that rescue last week. He still has the bruises."

"I didn't tell him to run into a wall with his head," Bill mumbled. He hated it when the counsellor was right.

"That's right, Bill, you do owe me one. And what about all those other times I've saved your skin? A couple of hours with a roomful of children is a small price to pay." Ralph, too, was a little tired of being taken for granted. Suit or no suit, saving the world once or twice a week was dangerous. "Just relax, and enjoy it."

"Hi, Mr. Hinckley, Ms. Davidson!" It was Rhonda, one of Ralph's students. "Glad you could make it. But didja hafta bring him?" She eyed Maxwell with ill-concealed distaste.

"You did say you wanted all the help I could round up. Don't worry, Rhonda. He'll do fine."

"If you say so, Mr. H." Privately, she had her doubts. Pointing toward the refreshments table across the gym, she directed, "Ms. Davidson, Ma's all by herself over there. Could you and Mr. Maxwell give 'er a hand? I've got somethin' else for you, Mr. H."

"Right." Pam nodded and, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes, added, "Come on, Bill. Let's see if we can find you an apron."

"Oh, no!"

* * * * *

Ralph was having a wonderful time. Along with a select few others, he had been assigned the task of helping the children construct Christmas cards for their parents. Guiltily, he wondered how Pam and Bill were faring amidst their sea of paper cups and gingerbread men. This is infinitely preferable...

As he tried to decide whether he should go in search of his friends, he felt a gentle tug on his sleeve, and looked down -- directly into the eyes of a little girl he had met a week before.

"Hello, Angel."

Damn! What do I do now? "Ah, hello...Susan," he read from her name tag.

"How come you're not wearing your angel suit?" she asked. It was a very important question. Angels were supposed to be consistent.

Running a glitter-coated hand through his curly blond mane, Ralph thought fast. There's no point in denying again that I'm an angel; she won't believe me. I might as well go along with her, and try to keep her quiet... Hunkering down in front of the little girl, he lowered his voice to his best conspiratorial whisper. "Shh!" he said. "I'm in disguise today. I don't always wear my red suit, you know."

"Oh," she considered. "But why are you here?"

"I'm watching someone. I spend a lot of time watching people." It wasn't exactly a lie. He watched his students all the time.

"Me?" she persisted.

"No." He looked around for a likely target, then smiled at the suitability of his choice. "See that man over there, the one behind the plate of chocolate chip cookies?" Bill doesn't ever need to know about this...

"Uh-huh."

"I'm his guardian angel. You mustn't tell anyone, Susan. Most people don't believe in angels."

"I know." She nodded sagely. "Mommy doesn't believe in you. When I told her, she said I had a good im...imag..."

"Imagination? Well, don't you worry about it." Maybe I can distract her... "Would you like to make a Christmas card for your mommy and daddy?"

But she wasn't quite finished with him. "Does everybody have an angel?"

"I'd like to think so." Something else occurred to him. "You know, we have names, just like you. Since we're friends now, you can't just call me 'Angel' any more. Why don't you call me 'Ralph' instead?"

"Okay." Sticking a finger into her mouth, she paused, then asked, "What's mine like?"

"Your what?"

"My angel. Will I ever get to meet my angel?"

This is a toughie... "No," Ralph replied at last. "I don't think you'll ever get to meet her. I'm kind of a special case. But," he added with a wink, "If you ever see a lady with hair like mine, wearing a purple jogging suit and orange sneakers..."

Susan listened solemnly to his outlandish description. "Can I make a card now, Ralph?"

"Sure. You go right ahead."

He watched as she moved off to the crafts table. Maybe it wasn't the right thing to do, but I can't very well let her talk about the suit. There are too many people here that I know, and I could never explain about UFOs and little green guys and...

The hand on his shoulder made him jump.

"Settle down! It's just me, honey." Pam had shed her apron in favour of a coat. "It's after five. Don't forget that appointment you have."

He glanced down at his watch. "Oh, yeah."

"What was that all about, anyway?"

"Huh?"

"The little girl. You two had your heads together for quite a while."

"Oh, that. It was just a little discussion about the latest fashion for super-heroes." His eyes twinkled with amusement as he explained what had transpired.

"You didn't!" Pam chuckled.

"What else could I do? Better that than trying to explain to my fellow teachers just exactly what I was doing downtown in a red leotard!"

"I suppose..."

"Suppose what?" Bill Maxwell broke into the conversation. "Aren't you two ready to go yet? I've had it!"

"Yes, Bill, I just have to get my coat and tell Rhonda we're leaving." Ralph thought for a second. "Why don't you and Pam go and get the car? I'll meet you out front in, say, about five minutes?" He tossed the keys to Pam.

"Great! Let's get outta here, Counsellor!" Grabbing Pam's arm, Maxwell turned and started across the gym.

"Just remember," Ralph's amused voice floated cryptically across the room behind them. "I'll be watching."

Pam started to giggle.

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LORNE GREENE

IN MEMORIAM

1915 - 1987

Tales Of



Sagittra

"Tales of Sagittara"

(By Lisa Mudano)

"What're you up to, buddy?" Starbuck queried as he entered his friend's quarters.

Apollo was busy checking out his appearance in a full-length mirror. "I've got a meeting over on the school ship with one of Boxey's teachers."

The Lieutenant grinned wolfishly. "Oh, really? Anyone I know?"

The other man shook his head, then gave a final brush to his dark brown hair. "I don't think so. Her name's Zena. She's Boxey's art teacher. It seems my son enjoys paint-fighting." The last remark was intended to get a chuckle from his friend, but Starbuck was silent. Curious, Apollo turned around.

Something had obviously affected the young Lieutenant. His jaw hung open slightly, and his pale blue eyes were glassy with shock. He seemed to be concentrating on something far away. Apollo moved quickly to his side. "Starbuck?"

His voice seemed to snap the other man from his trance. His eyes cleared a bit as they met the Captain's, and some colour returned to his face. He exhaled sharply. "Sorry about that," he sighed, running a trembling hand through his tangled blond hair. "Guess I'm a little out of it."

"What's wrong? C'mon, tell me."

"It's nothing, nothing." He shook his head slightly, as if to clear something from it. "It's just that name... Old memories. Let's drop it, okay? Tell me about this art teacher. Any possibilities between you two?" A shade of his familiar grin returned, but his eyes remained troubled.

Apollo took his friend by the arm and steered him to a chair. "You're not getting away that easily, Starbuck. Something's wrong. What is it?"

The Lieutenant laughed -- almost too jovially for Apollo's liking -- as he collapsed gracefully into the chair. "Really, Apollo, I'm fine. It's just that I knew a girl back at the Academy named Zena. Couldn't be the same one, though."

The Captain forced a laugh of his own, even though he could feel something dying inside him. This girl <u>was</u> the one Starbuck referred to; something made it quite inevitable. "Oh, really? What makes you think that?"

"She'd have been tapped for Warrior duty by now. With the intensive search we've got on all the time for new Warriors, there's no way the computer could've missed her. Besides, we had a lot of things unsettled between us. She'd have looked me up if she'd...survived..."

"Oh, Lords, why do I get the feeling we're talking about one of your...?" Once again, he ex-

pected Starbuck's usual banter. What he got was decidedly more hostile.

"No, dammit! She wasn't one of my...whatevers! She was my friend -- the only true friend I think I ever really had."

Apollo was more than slightly taken aback. "Starbuck, you never let anyone get close enough to you for that. Even Boomer and me, we're just acquaintances when you get right down to it."

The Lieutenant shook his head. "You're a lot more than that. I'm sorry, that didn't come out quite like I wanted it to. I was talking more about my time at the Academy, before I learned that not everyone in the world is out to use me, then abandon me." He smiled. "Zena was different. She got right around all my defences. Before I knew it, I was telling her everything. Whenever I had a problem, or even if I just wanted to talk, I knew I could go to her."

"Look, this Zena you knew... Was she half-Scorpian, half-Sagittarian?"

The young Warrior felt his heart leap as he nodded slowly. "Her mother was a Scorpian siress. Come to think of it, she was an artist, or something. Passed her telepathic skills on to Zena."

"I don't know how, but it sure sounds like we're talking about the same woman."

He had to admit it was starting to look that way. "She's kind of on the small side?" he asked. "Black hair, about to her shoulders? Black eyes that can look right through you?" Apollo nodded. "After five centons with her, you find yourself talking about your deepest feelings?" The Captain nodded once again, and Starbuck gave a long, shuddering sigh. "It's her. It has to be."

"Do you want to come with me? You're off duty right now, aren't you?"

He shook his head. "I can't. It's hard to explain, but it's been too long... Too many things have changed. I couldn't see her if she hates me for what happened..."

Apollo was intrigued. "You sure you don't want to tell me about it? I can't see you doing anything that bad, just as I can't imagine Zena hating anyone, no matter what they had done."

"If this concerned just me, you know I'd tell you in a flash. Problem is, Zena was as deeply involved in it as I was, and chances are it could do more damage to her than to me."

The two friends stood silently for a moment, each in his own way trying to decide what to do. Finally, Apollo went to his dresser and withdrew a small package from the top drawer. He unwrapped it and held it out so Starbuck could see what it was.

"Image tapes? What are you doing with those?"

Apollo passed the tapes to him. "When my father found out Zena was a Scorpian telepath and had been in the thick of the fighting on Sagittara, he asked if she'd mind turning over some of her tapes for the Archives. I haven't viewed them, but maybe you should. Just so you know a little about what you'll be dealing with."

He accepted the tapes gratefully. "Thanks, buddy. Hey, shouldn't you be getting out of here? Zena hates tardiness."

"You're right, of course." Apollo started out of the room, then turned back briefly. "Good luck, Starbuck."

"Thanks."

* * * * *

A quarter of a centar later, as he flew his shuttle toward the school ship, Apollo had to admit he didn't know what to think. Starbuck was so adamant that his relationship with Zena was purely platonic... I should believe him... It's just that the idea of Starbuck having any sort of platonic relationship with any woman is so incredible... And if they had the kind of relationship I suspect, where does that leave me...?

Unlike his philandering friend, Apollo had been truly in love with very few women in his life. There was his adopted sister Diana so long ago on Caprica -- a fire-haired beauty with a temper to match. Then, after the Destruction, there was Serina, the Caprican newswoman. She didn't have the temper Diana had been cursed with -- but she was certainly no less stubborn, and no less beautiful. Then, after she died, came Sheba. Daughter of Commander Cain, Cain the Juggernaut. Sheba had inherited every ounce of her father's strength of character -- and, again, stubbornness. Apollo had died for her, and he had loved her -- yet she, too, was now dead.

He was just beginning to live again, largely thanks to Boxey's art teacher. He didn't know what he would do if he lost her to Starbuck. "How do I compete with him?" he wondered out loud.

* * * * *

As Apollo flew toward the school ship, pondering the true nature of Starbuck's relationship with Zena, his friend sat in a cubicle in the Archives Section of the GALACTICA, where the history of the Colonies was preserved. Archives had the play-back machines necessary to view Scorpian image tapes.

He glanced at the small disc in his hand. Written on its surface, in a woman's handwriting, were the words, "Entry 43/6570-Recon. Sagittara" -- general information about the structure and content of the tape, including where and when it was recorded. The "Recon." notation indicated the entry was a reconstruction of a particular day, done as soon as the individual recording it was able to get to it.

Sagittara. He still couldn't quite believe it. True, it's the most obvious place for her to go. But I searched there... Thing is, now I can look back, I searched all the wrong places. I never thought to look for her in a shuttle yard... I'd've thought it decidedly beneath her style...

"Maybe you didn't know her as well as you thought," he mused aloud as he inserted the tape in the player and let it cycle.

Image tapes were a tradition among Scorpian telepaths, dating back nearly a millennium. They were a sort of diary the individual kept with fanatic regularity. Instead of being normal hand-written or computer-dictated journals, however, they were visual representations of a person's memories and thoughts. A voice-over traditionally accompanied the scenes, but the fascinating aspect of the tapes was the clarity with which those scenes were visually recreated.

Starbuck knew Archives was most interested in the visual aspect of Zena's entry, but what would help him most was her narration. Everyone was different since the Destruction of the Colonies,

and this was the easiest way to get acquainted with the woman she had become.

A green light flashed on the console, indicating the tape was ready for viewing. "Well, here goes nothing..."

He pressed the play-back button, and Zena's voice filled the cubicle -- soft, throaty, and warm, exactly as he remembered it. The viewing screen resolved into a head-shot of the speaker as she delivered her preliminary report.

"This is a reconstruction of Entry 43, Yahren 6570. Unimportant details of the day include my arrival at work at 0700 centars; the completion of the new president's shuttle for the ATLANTIA; and a fight with Latona over proper methods of welding a stabilizer -- a dispute Jason settled in her favour, the son of a daggit.

"Since this is a reconstruction, and according to tradition I have the right to focus on what I consider the most outstanding event of the day, I wish to deal specifically with the Cylon sneak attack on Sagittara, starting a centar prior to it. Calliope and I were finishing the military probe craft ordered by the GALACTICA..."

Knowing the action sequence of the tape was about to begin, Starbuck froze the image, taking a few centons to drink in the sight of the woman who had once been his dearest friend. Zena had hardly changed in all the yahrens since he'd last seen her. Her hair was raven-black and shiny, flowing back from her face in soft, fine waves. Her eyes were equally black, appearing several times more direct than they probably were. Her face was hardly an artist's dream, but there was a perpetual serenity to her mildly attractive features that he had always found quite beautiful -- although never as much as now. Her smile was frank, indicative of her demeanour.

Smiling at long-buried memories, Starbuck began the tape again.

The screen displayed the image of a fairly large shuttle-type craft, surrounded by the typical lightweight nysteel scaffolding shuttle-yard workers used for ease in climbing over their vessels. Two young women worked on the craft. One stood on the ground near the exhaust tubes, struggling with something, probably a sticky valve. The other straddled a strut atop the shuttle. Starbuck couldn't see much of her features; she was all but lost in the flare of a plasma torch. Instinctively, he knew the slim figure was Zena; the other woman was too tall, with short chestnut hair.

Zena's voice-over began. "It was very late. Most of the workers had gone home -- celebrating the Armistice, and all that. I imagine there weren't more than five people hanging around -- three of them waiting for Calliope and me to finish our work on a new military probe-shuttle for the GALACTICA. Selene was there to run the final checks when we finished; Hera was still around, going over the secton's records; and Jason -- that son of a daggit! -- was there because he was the supervisor and had to...supervise. For my thoughts on his ideas of his job, see Entry 66, Yahren 6567.

"At any rate, Calliope was working near the exhaust tubes, and I was doing some reinforcement work on top of the craft. From this point, I begin my entry."

* * * * *

"A truce means a lull in the fighting!" Callie hollered up at me. I was perched rather precariously atop the shuttle, welding a section of the hull, and she had to yell in order to be heard

above the low roar of my plasma torch. "If there isn't any fighting going on, why in the Twelve Worlds does Commander Adama need a military shuttle? Huh, Zena? Just tell me that, and I'll die a happy woman!"

"Just chill out, Callie, for Sagan's sake," I sighed, finally snapping off the torch and letting its superheated field die. "There's no point in busting a blood vessel over something you can't control." I lowered my goggles, both to see her better and to relieve some of the pressure of the head-strap on my skull. The requisite welders' goggles may have been the latest in protective gear, but they were uncomfortable, and tended to give me headaches.

Unfortunately for me and my headache, Calliope wasn't going to let the issue drop. She moved into the open so we could converse more easily. "You were almost one of them, though, Zee. I was hoping maybe you knew the reasoning behind this insanity."

"Well, I don't," I informed her quite matter-of-factly as I inspected the newly welded section of hull. "Scuttle-butt has it, though, that the Commander doesn't believe there's gonna be any peace."

That surprised her -- which, in turn, surprised me. Callie was so cynical about things concerning the war, I'd just assumed she shared the same suspicions as the GALACTICA's mysterious Commander. I certainly did, and I like to consider myself an optimist. "He doesn't think the Cylons'll go through with the Armistice?" she queried.

I shook my head, enjoying my friend's confusion. "Nope. And between you and me and the stars, I happen to think he's right. Catch!" Grinning mischievously, I heaved the plasma welder into the air.

As Calliope cursed and dove to catch the heavy tool, I swung over, grabbed the scaffolding, and clambered down to the ground, moving as quickly as possible. But before I could hop off the nysteel structure, I felt a man's hands grab me about the waist and lift me down. I tensed briefly, just out of instinct, but quickly relaxed. There was no danger -- and even if there were, my minor attack skills would have been enough to handle it.

I turned as soon as I was released, and came face to face with Jason, one of the supervisors. I knew he had seen me toss the torch. My luck was such that he <u>had</u> to show up just then. And he wasn't the sort to be amused by such things.

"Watch what you're doing, okay, Zena?" he hissed. "If that torch had broken, it would've cost you four sectons' pay to replace it!"

I smiled, although without much humour. Jason could be so damned <u>pompous</u> sometimes. It usually got on my nerves, and with my rapidly developing headache, this time was no exception. "Lighten up, Jason. She caught it, didn't she?"

He released my arms and stepped back, his face darkening with rage. "That's not the point, and you know it. Both of you, clowning around here..." He gestured wildly with his arms. "...when you've still got all this work to finish...!"

My expression must have changed, giving him some indication of the nerve he'd struck. Normally, I was cool and light-hearted about life in general. It was rare that the temper I'd inherited from my Scorpian mother flared. As far as I was concerned, though, if he didn't ease off right away, this was going to become a rare occasion -- and <u>fast</u>.

Luckily for all concerned, Jason saw the danger signs. "Get back to work," he repeated, and stalked away.

I watched him go. "Get back to work," I mocked him. "What the flying felgercarb does he think we've been doing all this time?"

Calliope shrugged, and returned to her battle with the stiff Ion-control valve. "He's just got a fly up his exhaust because we're still working. If it weren't for us, he could be home with Antiope and Joshua by now, celebrating the Armistice."

I shifted my gaze to her. She was getting absolutely nowhere. If I didn't do something to help, we'd be there all night. Shrugging, I went to her side. "If Commander Adama hadn't ordered this shuttle, we all could be home partying by now." My hands closed over Calliope's, and the two of us struggled to get the valve engaged.

We were silent for several microns, concentrating all our energy on the troublesome valve. It barely moved.

"I wonder what Lieutenant Starbuck's doing right now," Callie mused.

Somehow, I managed to keep a blank face and hold my tongue -- not an easy task against such pointed needling. Of late, I'd been thinking of Starbuck too damned much, and constant quips from my friends didn't help to make the longing any less painful.

There were days when I really regretted telling some of the girls about my past. I could blame the telling on too much baharri, but I could never take it back -- and sometimes, that hurt a lot. When my thoughts weren't so dark or pensive, I could look back on the events that took me from the Caprican Academy to a Nova City shuttle yard and chuckle appreciatively at the irony of it all. This wasn't one of those times.

Only a few short yahrens ago, I'd been sitting on top of the Twelve Worlds, as the saying went. I was heiress to my father's vast land holdings and my mother's social and artistic prestige; and even more important -- at least, to me -- I was attending the Caprican Military Academy, where I had hopes of graduating as a Warrior and going off to fight against the Cylon Empire. Then, in a few short centars, not even a secton from graduation, it all disappeared. I threw away my entire future for the sake of a friend...

The build-up of grief and memories and could-have-beens must have provided that final necessary surge of strength, for the valve finally flipped up, engaging immediately. Callie and I both collapsed against the side of the shuttle, gasping for breath, and grinning like idiots.

"I'd better get Selene, so we can finish this monster up," my friend remarked after a centon or so. She started off into the shadows.

"Take your time," I called after her as I eased myself over to the entry ramp, where I collapsed again. Every muscle in my body ached from climbing around the probe craft and controlling the heavy plasma welder.

The night settled in around me, bringing with it the painfully vivid memories that lately were never more than an instant's idle reflection away. I'd been reminiscing more than usual, I suppose, because of the peace talks. After all, with the most significant event in human history

about to take place, it was only natural to be reminded of those more personal events that had destroyed my chance to be a part of it all. Circe said that was the case, and Circe was taking night classes in psychology at Nova City's local college.

I could handle the memories. They were no problem for me, because they were just that -- memories. It was the voices I couldn't cope with. There were quite a few of them, and they all dealt with the same subject -- the incident that caused my expulsion from the Academy.

Zena, you are a disgrace to the Academy...

They're mine, sir. Starbuck was trying to dispose of them...

You had such potential, Zena. I'm terribly disappointed in you...

It is inconceivable to me that anyone as bright as you would throw away her career like this...

Zena, why...?

The last voice -- Starbuck's voice -- cried out loudest of all, and cut deepest. The only thing I really regret is that he got caught in that mess. Despite my best efforts, he didn't come away from it unscathed.

Anyway, I guess I'd been lying on the ramp, contemplating the stars and life in general -- and, yes, Lieutenant Starbuck -- for about twenty centons or so when I first heard the laser fire.

* * * * *

Starbuck froze the tape again. He'd expected more on the incident that tore them apart back at the Academy. Suddenly, he realized her reason for the vague, misleading references to the scandal. Knowing -- or at least suspecting -- the tape would eventually wind up in Archives, she'd edited out any specific mention of the affair, purposely keeping up the charade she'd started back in school. Vague references would produce predictable conclusions -- and no questions.

He chuckled pensively. "You've been out of my life for so many yahrens, yet your first instinct is still to protect me." It was odd, knowing she'd thought about him to such lengths, knowing she still considered the two of them friends, as if nothing had changed.

His thoughts wandered to the incident in question. It's laughable now, with so many yahrens and so much tragedy behind us, that such an insignificant occurrence could make such a difference in anyone's life, not just mine...

It was their senior yahren at the Academy, just prior to graduation. Finals had started. Up to that point, Starbuck had ranked first in the class, with Zena second, and a young noble named Cronus third. It had been that way for most of the term, and both he and Zena knew Cronus wasn't happy with the situation. But they hadn't considered he might try anything outside of bettering them in scholastic competition.

Starbuck was surprised to find he still shuddered when he recalled the moment the Provost summoned him and Zena to his office, where he announced that several kilos of a potent and highly illegal narcotic had been discovered in each of their rooms. When pressed for details, he said only that he was acting on an anonymous tip. He then leaned back in his chair and calmly asked

for an explanation.

The instant he asked for it, Starbuck's mind went blank -- the only time in history he could remember it having done so. It was no good to claim they'd never seen the drugs before; there was no way the Provost would believe them -- especially in Starbuck's case.

As he sat frozen in utter shock, Zena opened her mouth and began to spew the most well-constructed line of feigercarb he'd ever heard. She said all the drugs were hers, that her parents had recently died -- something he later learned was true -- and she needed money. Starbuck, she insisted, had found part of her stash and, as a favour to her, was going to dispose of it before the Provost was alerted. And, in fact, he hadn't even found her entire supply.

Starbuck couldn't believe his ears. There was nothing he could say. She'd set him up as noble and rule-abiding, and any attempt to blow her story would only reinforce it. It was a masterpiece, and he hated her for it.

He wasn't too surprised when the Provost asked him to leave; the man wanted to question Zena privately. Starbuck went quietly, nursing an incredible feeling of dread that got worse as the day wore on. It was against the rules for him to loiter around the Provost's office, so he went back to his room and called Zena's, leaving a message for her to contact him as soon as she returned.

Centars went by; she didn't call. He spent the entire time pacing the floor, desperately trying to come up with some way to get her off the hook -- and he came up with nothing. Finally, he called the Provost's office; the man's secretary told him Zena had left over ten centons earlier, and wasn't returning. She'd been expelled.

Badly shaken, Starbuck immediately went to the women's residence, hoping to talk to her before she left, and ended up missing her by no more than five centons. Lavanna, her roommate, handed him a note in which she said good-bye, asked him not to try to find her, and begged that he not make her sacrifice a vain one.

The next hundred or more centars were no more than a bad dream. Starbuck wasn't sure precisely what had happened; all he knew was that someone had framed them, and that Zena had thrown away her career to save his.

A centar before graduation, a friend passed along some information gleaned from Cronus's roommate. Cronus had bragged incessantly about getting rid of Zena. Starbuck hadn't made the connection with their rival before then; when it was finally made for him, he nearly killed the other cadet. Only Lavanna's reminder of their friend's sacrifice held him back.

After graduation, before accepting his commission aboard the GALACTICA, the new Warrior went to Sagittara to find Zena. With the little knowledge he had of her family, he spent nearly a sectar searching for her. But he searched through the upper-middle classes of the planet's society -- and she had chosen to completely lose herself by disappearing into the working class.

Then, when the Cylons destroyed the Colonies, Starbuck gave up. He assumed she was dead.

Mechanically, his finger depressed the play-back button again, and Zena's voice continued her narration.

* * * * *

It was strange. There was no way someone would fire a laser on shuttle-yard grounds, and there was no reason for it. Even the few ships' weapons we tested were fired only in flight, where they could do little damage. Hauling myself to my feet, I headed in the general direction of the sound to investigate.

I saw nothing at first, but the sound of laser fire grew louder and more distinct. Then I rounded the corner of a ship, and the nightmare began. In the split micron I stood exposed, I saw the last thing I ever expected.

A pair of Cylon centurions marched between the rows of ships! Every so often, they fired their weapons at some target I couldn't see.

As I said, it was only a split micron before my reflexes kicked in. I threw myself back the way I'd come, and worked my way into a shadowy niche between two struts on one of the shuttles.

I stayed there for about five centons or so, completely numb with shock. Cylons, walking around as if they owned the frakkin' place! What was going on? Where was the Fleet? How was the Fleet? And how in Sagan's name did Cylons manage to land on Sagittara, of all places?

Of course, I found out the answers later. But in those first few centons, all I knew was confusion, betrayal, and fear.

Much later, when I was able to compare notes with survivors from the other Colonies, I realized the Cylons considered Sagittara a special case. Elsewhere, from Aquaria to Scorpia, they used their Raiders to wipe out every human they found. But in the case of Sagittara, they saw much they could use, especially our heavy industry.

Anyway, when the two centurions had passed, I roused myself; I had to find out what had happened to my friends. As an old combat-theory instructor had drummed into my skull, where there's one Cylon, there are usually more, and if we were under attack, I was safer with a group than by myself. It took a few centons to orient myself, but as soon as I was certain where I was, I headed straight for the main yard office.

I don't remember what I was thinking as I raced between the shuttles; in fact, I'm pretty sure my mind was blank. But I instinctively kept one ear cocked for any sound of Cylons.

I'd almost reached the edge of the shuttle field when my foot hit something, and I automatically looked down. It was all I could do to bite back a shriek of surprise and horror -- I'd nearly fallen over Calliope, who lay sprawled in the dust.

When my nerves were back under control, I knelt beside her. "Callie?" I called softly, even though I knew she couldn't possibly hear me. There was blood on her head, and more soaking her coveralls. Shaking, I brushed her short hair aside and reached for her throat, trying to find a pulse. But there was none. She was dead.

I stumbled back, gagging, as the truth hit me. Calliope was dead. This was war, and it was much closer to home than it had any blessed right to be.

Before I could surrender to the horror and the panic, my ears caught the sound of Cylons approaching. Adrenalin took control, and I ran. Thoughts of my friends and of proper procedures were frozen, forgotten. Only self-preservation remained.

As my feet pounded the packed dirt, my mind turned over the possibilities of the situation. If there were as many centurions around as I suspected, it was entirely conceivable I was the only human being left alive in the shuttle yard. I had no idea about the rest of the planet. Briefly, I wondered about the Colonial Fleet, but quickly closed off that line of thinking.

It was obvious I had to find a place to hide -- a good place, where Cylon ground squads wouldn't find me. I slowed, then came to a stop, breathing heavily. From the first instant I'd heard the laser fire, I'd unconsciously listened for the sounds of Raiders overhead -- but I hadn't heard any.

"No Raiders..." I mused, then suddenly had my answer. Turning to the shuttle on my left, I grabbed a stabilizing fin and began the gruelling task of hauling myself to the top of the ship. They'd never see me up there.

As I scrambled up the hull, I heard a centurion move into position directly beneath me, trying to take aim. We're civilians! I thought despairingly. We're not prepared to fight them, dammit! We shouldn't have to...!

It wasn't fair. True, few things in this life are, but one thing all of us had begun to accept as the norm was that the Cylon-Human War was strictly a military struggle.

We were very wrong. If I had the time, I could have re-analyzed the entire civilian outlook on the War. Obviously, I didn't have the time. Staying alive was all that counted.

My hands closed on the topmost strut; all I had to do was haul myself over to the apex of the craft, and I'd be safe from everything but an overhead attack. I tensed, preparing for the effort. And suddenly, my left leg collapsed.

It was several microns before I realized I'd been shot. I gritted my teeth and somehow managed to pull myself to relative safety. I don't know how I did it, but then, thinking back, I'm not really sure I know how I did half the things I did that night.

Once I was safely out of range of any laser fire, I lay on my back, staring up at the sky, trying to suppress the pain that washed over me in waves. I refused to even look at my wound; crazy as it sounds now, I had to classify it as counter-productive. Of course, at the time, I had no idea how serious it was.

Centons passed, as I ran through several alternative plans I could implement once the immediate crisis was over. Unfortunately, none of them were workable. I had no idea where the Fleet could be found -- or even if there was a Fleet left to find. And if the Cylons managed to take over every last one of the Colonies...

I was finally jerked from my reverie by the realization that everything was quiet in my immediate vicinity, and that someone was walking around on the ground below me -- someone human.

"Zena!" a voice called.

Cautiously, I peered over the edge of the shuttle, and nearly burst into tears of relief. It was Jason, and he was alone.

I've never been so happy to see anyone or hear anyone's voice. Even if it was Jason. He was



human, and he was someone I knew.

After scanning the area one more time for any lingering Cylons, I leaned over the edge of the craft. "Jason! Up here!" He looked up sharply, and I waved.

His face broke into a relieved grin, and he waved back. "Come on down," he called. "We're clear for now!"

Moving cautiously, for my leg was fast losing the comforting numbness of the past few centons, I got down the side of the ship. When I reached the ground, he enveloped me in a bear-hug. "Thank the Lords you're safe!" he whispered.

I stayed in his arms for a centon, enjoying the illusion of safety, then pulled back. "Once I figured out they weren't sending Raiders against us, it was easy. I just got above the fighting. Not very noble, but it kept me alive."

We shared an all-too-brief laugh. "I'm glad you're all right, too," I told him. "How about Selene and Hera?"

He nodded, and I sighed with relief, taking an involuntary step backwards. That's when he noticed my leg. "You're hurt!" he exclaimed. "How bad is it?"

I shook my head, shrugging off the injury. "Don't worry about me. What's going on?"

His expression was sober, and I saw with some surprise that he'd been crying. "Apparently, the peace conference was a trap. Reports say all the Colonies have been attacked, and nearly wiped out."

"What about the Fleet?"

"The GALACTICA's the only ship left of those escorting the president. Commander Adama's sent word that anyone who can find a spaceworthy vessel is to rendezvous in the skies above Cymtar."

"Jason," I asked, almost afraid to know, "have you tried to reach Antiope?" She was his wife.

He nodded, and as he did, the tears he'd been fighting broke free. I held out my arms, and he stumbled into my embrace, shaking violently with heart-rending sobs.

I released him when his tears had passed, and he drew back. "We didn't know what happened to you and Callie. As soon as the death squad left the yard, I came out to look for you."

"Jason..." I began. Words failed me as the image of Calliope's bloody corpse filled my mind. It was his turn to hold me again.

"I know," he whispered, his face buried in my hair. "I found her..."

We stood that way, just holding each other, for as long as we could. Finally, though, we both knew we had to get moving. If the damage done by the Cylons was as extensive as we suspected, we couldn't stay.

"Selene and Hera are really all right?" I asked again.

He slung an arm around my shoulders and steered me in the direction of the yard office. "Yes. Lords, we were lucky. We went to investigate the laser fire, and spotted them right off. We all managed to hide while they tore up the office." He chuckled bitterly. "Imagine, I thought the laser fire was you and Callie fooling around again."

I had to laugh. It was absurd, but it was such a Jason thing to think. He continued. "When we were able to get back into the office, we found a coded message coming over the com. Selene broke the code. It was from the GALACTICA, about the rendezvous. Our only problem is to find a ship that'll fit the requirements they've set."

"Which are?" I knew relatively little about the way the enigmatic Commander Adama thought and worked, but this sounded like him.

"Lean on me. We'll continue this with Selene and Hera."

I had little time to think during the brief walk to the yard's main office, for most of my attention was focussed on suppressing the pain in my injured leg. I knew I'd pay for it later, but so be it. It was that, or lie down and give up. All I could hope was that, when everything finally caught up with me, it would be in a place where someone could take care of me, not somewhere I had to look out for myself.

The office was a mess. Furniture was overturned and smashed; files and computer tapes were scattered everywhere. Selene sat at the communications table, fooling with the equipment. Half the stuff looked like it was ready for the junk-pile.

Before I could comment on the state of the place, I was struck from the side, and literally staggered with the force of Hera's greeting. "Thank the Lords!" she cried, bursting into tears.

Selene turned from her work. "That's it, Jason -- no more information."

He sighed. "Well, then. All we need is a ship."

Hera guided me to a nearby chair, and I sat down gratefully. "Jason," I reminded him, "you still haven't told me the specs for this escape ship we need."

Selene answered for him. "It needs to be spaceworthy, preferably with hyperspace capability, but definitely with the durability for a prolonged space voyage."

We were quiet for a while, just thinking. After all, we were in a shuttle yard. Most of what we had was up for repairs, and what wasn't was only good for short distances...

Then I remembered the transport. "What about the recon vessel Callie and I were working on?"

Hera and Jason looked like they actually might give the idea some consideration, which was great with me. As far as I was concerned, it was our best chance.

But Selene didn't agree. "We need a ship," she said bluntly, "not some jury-rigged, souped-up shuttle. If Commander Adama is thinking about taking us some place where we can live in relative safety, it's going to be a long journey -- longer than that little ship can cope with."

"To Hades with that!" I snapped. "It's spaceworthy, and specifically designed for long-distance recon work. If I understand the message right, it more than fits the requirements for joining

the GALACTICA. Besides, I'd rather take my chances with the unknown than with those Cylon creeps. I know what they're gonna do if they catch us!"

Her eyes narrowed slightly. "Are you sure you're not trying to risk our lives just for a chance to see Lieutenant Starbuck again?"

I resisted the impulse to slap her across the face. "He could be dead by now, for all I know -- or care, at this point. At any rate, he's in the past, and the Cylons are very much in the present. Take your choice. Come with me, or stay here and be captured by the Cylons."

My leg was killing me, and it was only my deep-rooted survival instinct that kept me from simply collapsing in the dirt and waiting for the invaders to find me. Just then, I wanted nothing more than to break down and cry. It's probably to my credit that I didn't. It is definitely to my discredit that I haven't yet.

To my amazement, Jason took my side. "Selene," he told her in his "don't mess with me" voice, "Zena's right. We need a ship, and we need one now. The transport is our best hope."

"But it'll never survive a journey of any length!" she protested.

"It doesn't need to. There are only four of us. Once we hook up with the GALACTICA, we can scrub it in favour of space on one of the other ships. It won't be any problem."

Okay, so he was being a tad optimistic. Who would've thought everything would be as crowded as it is? Suffice it to say, we <u>did</u> get off Sagittara in one piece.

* * * * *

The images stopped, and the viewing screen resolved once again into a tight head-shot of Zena. "Nothing much else happened that day. We successfully hooked up with the GALACTICA and ships from the rest of the Colonies. The first thing we did was turn our transport over to the GALACTICA, and they arranged for new quarters for all of us. Assignments came later.

"I'd like to close this tape by commenting that I can't believe we were able to deal that intimately with the GALACTICA without word getting back to Lieutenant Starbuck. Some day, maybe when we're settled on this world Commander Adama speaks so reverently about, I'll hunt him up. Some day -- when what I did for him no longer matters to the rest of the world.

"This concludes Entry 43, Yahren 6570."

Starbuck stopped the tape, his heart pounding with emotion. It was all too incredible for him to accept -- yet too simple and too like the kind of luck that always followed Zena for him to deny it.

His thoughts whirled. All he knew was that he had to see her.

He had to see her, and to Hades with the consequences. Leaving the image tape in the player, he rushed from the viewing cubicle.

* * * * *

Zena sat in the middle of her classroom about five centons after Apollo left. She had expected

to meet with the man, to discuss his son's behaviour in class -- nothing too serious. She had definitely not been prepared to hear that Lieutenant Starbuck knew she was alive and well and teaching art on the Fleet's school ship. The situation presented possibilities and problems she wasn't prepared for, and now, she suddenly would have to cope with them.

"This is ridiculous!" she cried finally, throwing her hands up in disgust. "He was going to find out about you eventually, Zena -- might as well be realistic about it! You knew what you were risking when you gave Apollo those damned tapes!" She paused briefly. "Question is, what do I do about it now that it's happened?"

It was no good running any more. She knew Starbuck well enough to realize her explanation of so many yahrens ago would never have satisfied him. He's so naive about what public opinion can do to a person. Now that he knows I'm alive, he won't rest until he finds me...

"He's probably on his way over here right now," she laughed to herself. "Hades' blood, I'm surprised he waited long enough to watch the tapes!"

"I had to know something about the kind of person you've become."

Startled, she looked up sharply. Starbuck stood in the doorway. A torrent of emotions washed over her -- some of them her own, some of them not. Grabbing her cane, she pushed herself to a standing position.

"I had to know if you hated me or not," the man finished.

"What?" The question, so simple, and yet so very complicated, brought tears to her eyes.

He took a few tentative steps into the classroom. "I let you take the rap back at the Academy. I never knew how you felt about it."

His concern was her undoing. Her cane fell to the floor with a clatter as she held out her arms to him. "Oh, Starbuck!" she cried as he rushed into her arms.

They held one another quietly for a long time; it was something they had both thought would never happen. When they finally separated, Zena brushed tears from her eyes. "What in Hades do you mean, you let me take the rap for you? You didn't have any choice in the matter! I couldn't let a brilliant career like yours be wasted."

He smiled in spite of himself. "Oh, so you were just going to throw away your own to save mine? What kind of sacrifice is that?"

"The very best kind. I did it because I wanted to. Nobody forced me into it. I did it because you were like a brother to me. Still are, in fact."

Starbuck pulled her close again. "I thought you must have died in the Destruction," he told her. "Why didn't you try to get in touch with me?"

She sensed a tone of betrayal in his voice, something she had desperately hoped wouldn't be there. "It was easier that way," she told him. "If I'd started hanging around with you again, somebody might've recognized us, and there would have been questions."

He chuckled bitterly. "Do you have any idea how many times I have damned you to Hades for being

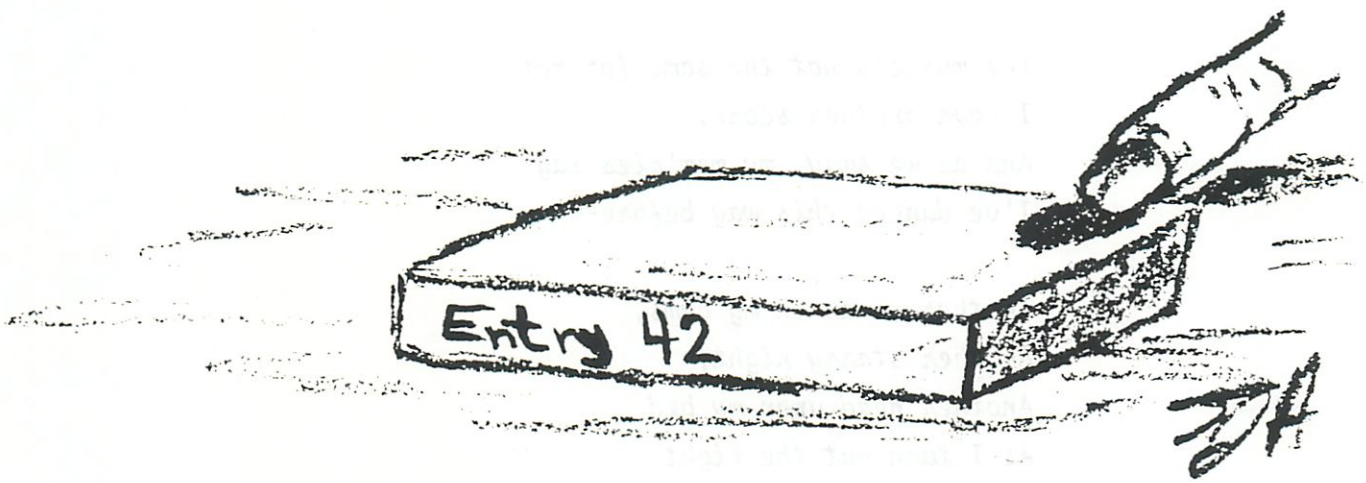
so frakkin' noble? Zena, I don't care what people think. If what happened still matters to them, they're not the kind of people I want to associate with. My real friends will believe the truth. We didn't have anything to do with those drugs, and you know it. It was Cronus, not us."

She laughed, pulling away from him. "Yeah, Cronus. You know that, and I know that, but the records say they were mine. And you know what they say, Starbuck. Records don't lie."

A mischievous glint came into his eyes, and he took her by the hand. "That's pure felgercarb -- felgercarb we are going to clean up right now. Come on!" He picked up her cane and ceremoniously presented it to her.

"What are you doing? Where are you taking me, you nut-case?"

"We've got a meeting with some friends of mine, to talk about getting some records changed!"



"Star Dancing"

(By Mary Robertson)

Time heals those wounds that tear the heart,
But memories are long.
I'm holding you, but dancing to
A half-remembered song.

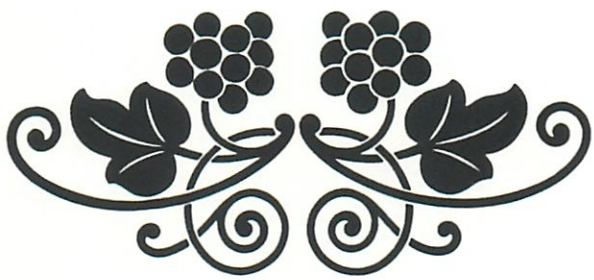
The music's not the same for me;
I hear another score.
And as we sway, my mem'ries say
I've danced this way before---

Another woman in my arms,
Another starry night,
Another head upon my bed
As I turn out the light.

But hold me close and share this dance,
This consummate duet,
And if our close is close enough...
Perhaps I will forget.

STAR TREK:

RETROSPECTIVE



BY

joan hanke-woods



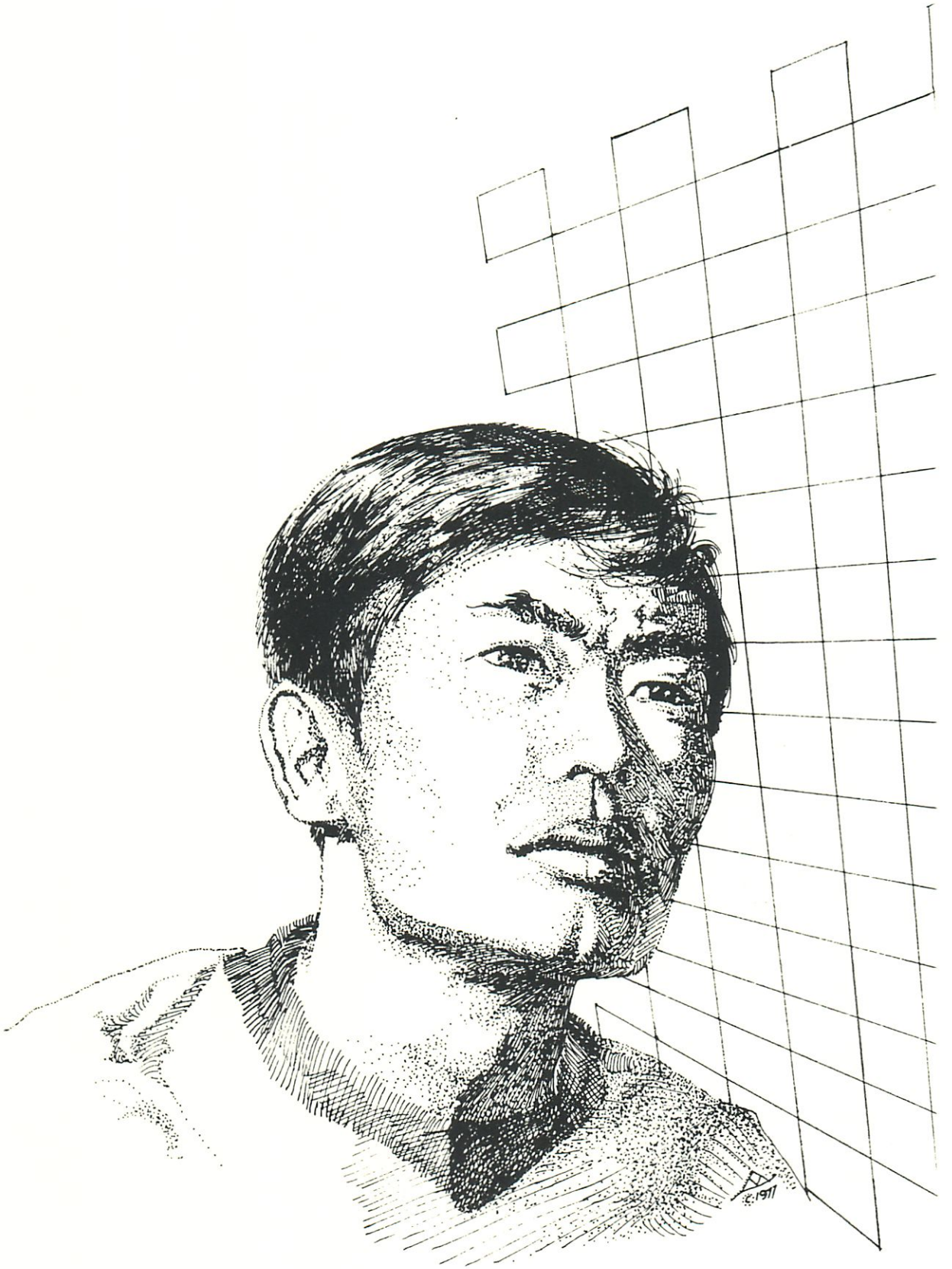


rank


©1977
the price paid



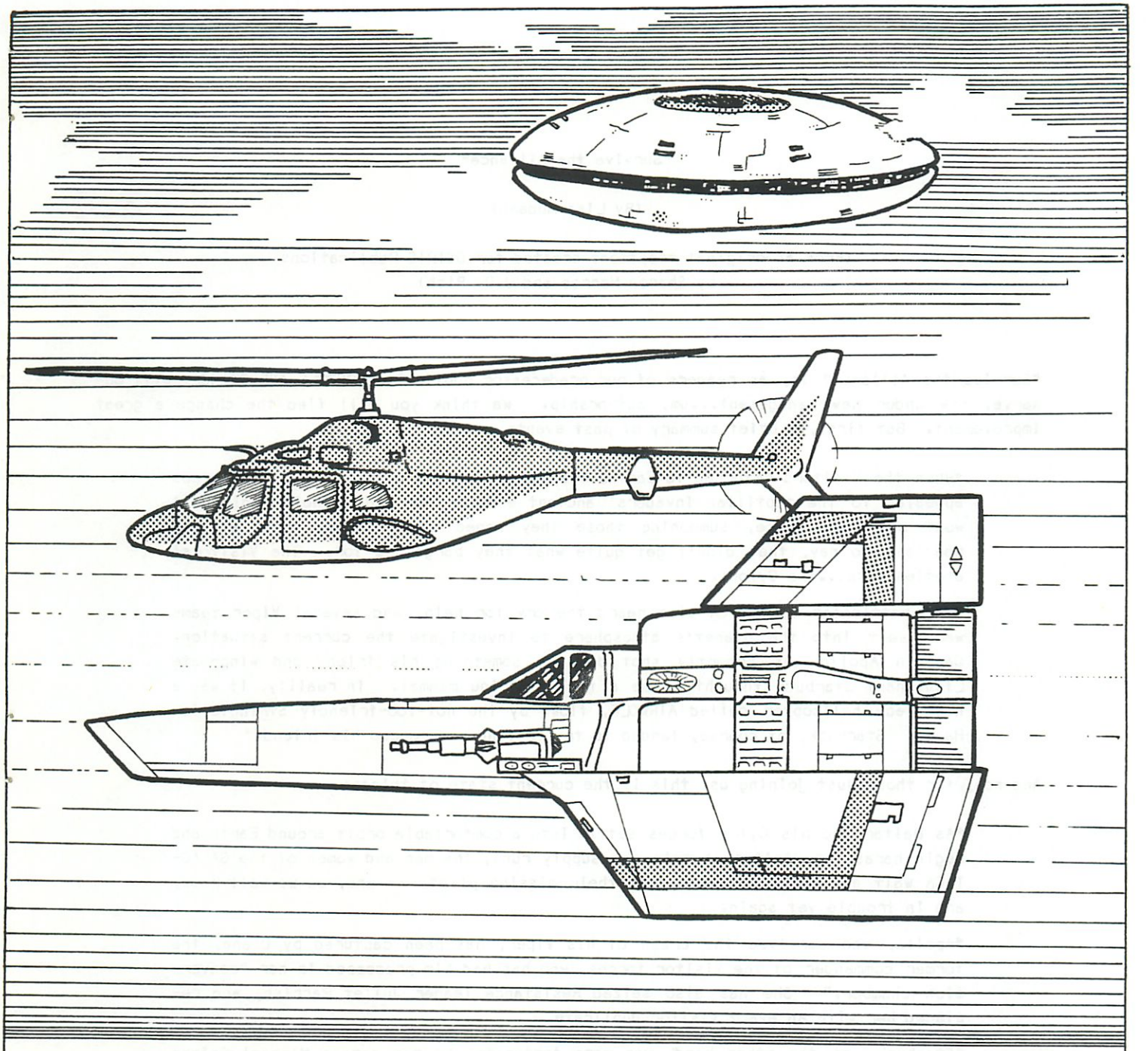
ancient alchemy



guide



meld



SURVIVE THE ALLIANCE

"Survive the Alliance"

(By Lisa Mudano)

(From an original treatment created for OSIRIS Publications
by Sharon Monroe and J.D. Rich)

"Survive the Alliance" is, as readers of our predecessor publication PURPLE AND ORANGE? will observe, now under new management...um, authorship. We think you will find the change a great improvement. But first, a brief summary of past events.

*When the Visitors returned to Earth, the human fighters of the Resistance forces appealed to the reptilian invaders' ancient enemies for aid. Their radio call went out into space, summoning those they hoped would become their allies. Needless to say, they didn't get quite what they bargained for. The Visitors' enemies were...the Cylons.

The battlestar GALACTICA also heard the cry for help, and several Viper teams were sent into the planet's atmosphere to investigate the current situation. Captain Apollo was promptly shot down by something his friend and wing-mate Lieutenant Starbuck thought to be a flying marine mammal. In reality, it was a high-tech helicopter called AIRWOLF, flown by the not-too-friendly Stringfellow Hawke. Starbuck, of course, landed to try to find and rescue his friend.

And now, for those just joining us, this is the current state of things:

*As Baltar and his Cylon forces settle into a comfortable orbit around Earth and begin harassing Visitor shuttle and supply runs, the men and women of the GALACTICA wait anxiously for word from their missing pilots -- who, as we well know, are in trouble yet again.

*Apollo, who survived the crash of his Viper, has been captured by Diana, the former commander of the Visitor forces, who has had him processed in her "conversion chamber." She has also seized Resistance leader Juliet Parrish, and replaced her with an exact Visitor duplicate.

*Starbuck, on the other hand, was more fortunate; he ran across Michael Knight and his talking Trans Am, KITT -- agents for the Foundation for Law and Government. After some fancy talking, Starbuck persuaded Michael and KITT to help him search for the wreckage of Apollo's Viper.

*Inspector General Phillip, current head of the Visitor forces, has charged a band of human mercenaries led by Resistance hero Ham Tyler with the task of tracking down Diana and bringing her to justice.

*Meanwhile, the Earth-based forces (the good guys) have learned that the shuttle carrying the Visitor Leader and his new consort, the Starchild Elizabeth Maxwell, was sabotaged by Diana. It has been intimated that all aboard were killed.

It has also been suggested that one should trust one's instincts.

All in all, quite a jumbled mess. And that is the state of things as we begin...

Part III: Attitude Adjusted

Diana smiled conspiratorially at the blonde Visitor seated before her. "You look well, Juliet. Are you prepared to return to your duties at Science Frontiers?"

"Of course, Commander." She returned the smile; it was the only thing about her that was not the exact image of Dr. Juliet Parrish. "You desire certain personnel placed in key positions, with security observation of others. I assume status of current research and access to specialized experimental equipment are also among your primary concerns for the present."

"You read my mind, my dear."

"I won't let you down, Commander." At Diana's sharp glance, she became somewhat flustered. "Sorry...Diana."

The Visitor leader allowed her gaze to remain stern a moment longer, then smiled. "I trust not." It was, at best, an icy reassurance.

After Juliet left, the dark-haired reptilian Commander snacked on gold-fish -- an expensive delicacy in the desert -- as she awaited her second appointment of the early dawn hours.

Lieutenant James arrived a few moments later. "We have secured our objective," he told her with a somewhat presumptuous smile. "The human community of San Carlos is now under our control. We have taken sufficient hostages to assure the cooperation of the inhabitants, and can begin transfer at your command."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Begin transferring our supplies and personnel. I prefer to be closer to a centre of civilisation as soon as possible -- assuming the place is indeed secure. The conversion process must begin immediately. I would rather rely on personal loyalty, not merely on obedience through coercion. These humans can be so treacherous... You may go."

He looked displeased at the abrupt dismissal, but accepted her implied censure with only a small hiss as he saluted and left the sparsely decorated command chamber.

Diana glanced around. <u>At least this place is dry... The vegetation and animal life are almost enough to make me homesick...</u>

She fished another shimmering, flopping creature from the transparent bowl beside her, and delicately halved the fish before swallowing it. As she enjoyed the extra burst of flavour, she considered her next guest, who was coming in response to a special request, and would help to strengthen the conversion-chamber loyalty grafted onto the human Captain Apollo, her most recent toy. Before she could devote the time his wealth of information demanded, she had to insure his unwavering devotion. The particular means of doing so had presented itself early in his conversion treatment.

To best utilize the opportunity, she had selected one of her female officers and commanded that the alien be outfitted in a new bodysuit, wig, and clothing. James had protested, saying their valuable supplies were few enough without wasting time and energy on new bodysuits.

Diana sighed as she recalled their argument. <u>He is becoming so tiresome...</u>

But in the end, he had done as ordered, and with the result of his efforts standing before her, she had to admit the job had been flawlessly done.

"Exquisite!" she exclaimed, walking around the newest arrival in her office, studying her from all angles. "Captain Apollo cannot help but love you, my dear. You are exactly as he remembers his dear, departed wife Serina."

"Yes, Commander," her subordinate replied noncommittally.

"I promised him his heart's desire, Serina, and you are it. Have you studied the tapes I gave you?"

"Yes, Commander."

"Very good. From this moment on, you love Apollo more than life itself."

"If I must." She sounded as though the prospect disturbed her.

"You will do it, Serina," Diana stated coldly, and there was no mistaking the deadly undertone to her voice. "Come. It is time you were reunited with your dearly beloved husband. I just adore reunions."

* * * * *

Standing at a large bay window in the Visitor Legation's command centre, Lydia watched the rising of Sol, Earth's sun, as she waited for news of the attack on Diana and her renegades. Soon, Tyler should be calling to report success or failure in ferreting out the former Commander's hidden base.

To distract herself, she turned her thoughts back to the sun, and to the construction of the solar system they presently occupied. "Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars," she recited. She had always found that fascinating. The humans have such a wonderful tendency to name planets after legends from their own culture... "Mars, hmm? Some old deity of war," she recalled. "At least, in that, they show some promise. They recognize war's place in the cosmos..."

Her thoughts then turned to the makers of war, beginning with the Leader. She had met him once. He had decorated her personally, and had won her undying loyalty. He was dead now -- at Diana's hands. There is no way I can prove she killed him, but I know...

Then there was Phillip, current leader of the Visitor fleet in this sector. He was pulling them together again, preparing for war with the Cylons, and considering an alliance with the humans. If he can bring us victory, it is conceivable he could one day be Leader himself...

She served Phillip as she had once served the Leader, with complete loyalty and unswerving devotion. She compared him with Charles, the devastatingly desirable Prince of Raman who had so briefly been her lover before marrying Diana -- and eventually succumbing to poison. Diana would have succeeded in executing me for that, if not for Phillip's timely intervention...

Her lips thinned. A pity Charles and Diana did not have more time to plot against each other. He was so arrogantly certain of success... She would have shown him the error of such thinking before too long. Then, when the time was ripe, I could have stepped in and crushed her...

Her hands tightened into fists as she savoured the fantasy.

* * * * *

Hannibal Smith checked his watch one more time. The sun tinted the horizon a brilliant orange, with deep purple banding the lightening sky. Dawn... The time of day when Earth's lizards are most likely to be caught napping... They were taking Ham Tyler's word that the Visitors had similar habits.

"Go!" He gave the whispered order over a small walkie-talkie, then moved out among the rocks, staying low to avoid Diana's sentries.

A moment later, he came across a gutted alien. Faber's work... His own people were neater. Only Tyler's "inner circle" took such delight in mutilating the Visitor dead.

"Remind me never to get on their bad side." Templeton Peck, known as Face, moved up beside the Colonel, looking grim. Something in his nature abhorred bloodshed; he would kill when necessary, but as a rule preferred to con his way into and out of trouble. He was the best at it, too, often playing for the highest of stakes. His loyalty to the team was absolute, and he was as competent a soldier as any of them. Like all of the A-Team, he was addicted to "the jazz."

"Yeah." Smith bit off one end of a cigar, but left the wicked-smelling stogie unlit; he was too professional to risk giving away their position. "But it does save us the bother of dealing with prisoners. Let's move."

The two former Special Forces officers left the torn green body where it lay. A moment later, they heard shots and a yell from just ahead of them -- Tyler, two minutes before the agreed-upon signal to open fire. "That man has no respect for a good plan," Smith muttered as he and Face ran to join the battle.

The Visitors they fought were in the process of loading boxes of equipment into a purloined semi-trailer when attacked. The sounds of laser fire and ricochetting bullets quickly brought more of the enemy from the cavern in the side of the rocky mountain.

Having successfully infiltrated the cavern past the defenders, Face paused a moment to catch his breath. When he stepped out from a sheltering niche between two boxes, he found himself face to face with a dark-haired stranger in a brown outfit unlike anything he'd ever seen before.

He realized at once that the man was human -- a stray shot had grazed his left arm, and the wound bled bright red. He also had to be a prisoner of Diana's; none of Tyler's people dressed like that, and the weapon locked in his grip was clearly of alien origin.

Face grabbed the man's good arm. "Here! Hide behind these boxes. We'll have the place mopped up in a few minutes, and then we can get some help for your arm..."

Hatred glared from the stranger's green eyes as he studied the mercenary. "You!" he hissed. "You left me to die!" The laser in his hand zeroed in on the other man's chest.

"What?" Face stared at him; he'd never even seen him before. "Hey, put that gun down! I'm trying to help you..."

"I'm going to kill you, Starbuck, if it's the last thing I do..."

"Starbuck...?"

The strange weapon pointed unerrinngly at him as the man's mouth curled in a snarl. Face knew he wouldn't have a second chance. I just hope you're as irrational as you look... His foot lashed out in a round-house kick, and the weapon flew from the other man's right hand as he yelped in pain.

It was a momentary distraction, but all Face and his fast reflexes needed. Flicking his own borrowed laser to "stun," he fired, and the stranger crumpled to the dirt floor.

"We'll pick you up later," he muttered as he dragged the unconscious man between two boxes to conceal him.

He leaped back into the fray, just in time to dive into a small knot of Visitor soldiers. He sent them rolling like bowling pins, then lit into them with his weapon. A moment later, B.A. and Murdock joined him. But they were badly outnumbered, and were slowly forced back toward the mouth of the cave until several of Tyler's men arrived as reinforcements.

Suddenly, it was all over. Those of the aliens who were still on their feet retreated, leaving the cavern in Resistance hands.

"Too easy," Smith muttered as he surveyed the damaged hide-out.

"Easy!" Face cried, staring up at him from the floor. "You call that easy?" For emphasis, he rubbed his shoulder, where a Visitor had sent him flying into some heavy equipment. He'd have bruises for a week.

"Fool's on the jazz," B.A. growled.

"Personally, I think we did remarkably well against the brutes," Murdock sniffed, affecting an exaggerated British accent.

Ham Tyler stepped into his path. "Nobody asked you, Captain." His flat, non-reflective eyes were cold, his voice deadly.

As if someone had flicked a switch, Murdock's adopted persona disappeared, to be replaced by his own personality. Standing toe to toe with Tyler, he began to look extremely uncomfortable; finally, unable to stand the scrutiny any longer, he dropped his gaze to the floor.

Satisfied, Tyler turned from him and addressed the entire gathering. "Smith's right. The snakes were protecting something. My guess is this whole resistance show by them was to buy escape time for Diana."

And we played right along... That's what bothered him the most. He'd spent part of the battle on his own, scouting the inner chambers of the cave system, looking for the Visitor leader. He hadn't found her; the elusive enemy had slipped away again -- although, this time, her escape had cost her.

Face suddenly snapped his fingers, and ran to check on the man in brown he'd encountered during the battle. "Gone," he reported to the Colonel after explaining the meeting. "And he acted like

he knew me, and hated me for some reason."

"You ever meet his sister?" Smith cracked. "Well, whoever he is, he's not here now. Good thing Tyler didn't see him first, or we wouldn't have any mystery to worry about."

Tyler overheard his last words, and glared at him. Smith merely grinned back, and finally lit his cigar. "If he's working for them, he's not one of us any more," the Resistance leader snarled, "and I won't cry at his funeral."

"Let's find out who he is before we bury him, okay?" Face interrupted. "He acted like he might have been converted." He felt intensely curious about the stranger. Who is he? Why did he seem to recognize me? And why was his instant reaction hatred and a drawn weapon?

Tyler shrugged. "If you get to him first, fine. But he'd better stay out of my way."

As he briskly strode away, Murdock -- proving he might be hurt, but could never be beaten -- stuck his tongue out at Tyler's retreating back. The defiant gesture brought more than a few appreciative smiles and chuckles from the other members of the A-Team.

Murdock sniffed. "I was going to suggest we room together at the V.A., but if he's always like that..."

* * * * *

"We're still working on the alien craft, but have no idea how the thing works," Julie Parrish reported. Mike Donovan and the enigmatic man known as "Archangel" nodded in response.

"I don't think we'll need any extra help from UCLA, however. This could be security material, and we don't want just anybody having access to it."

"I can see that," the government agent conceded, tapping his fingers on his cane.

"I'm not sure I care for all this government security..." Donovan began with a frown.

The blonde scientist shook her head. "Sorry, Mike. I wish I could tell you both more, but..." Her voice trailed away, and she waved her report. The meaning was obvious -- she had work to do, and they were keeping her from it.

"We'll call it top secret for now, Dr. Parrish," Archangel decided. "I'll send you a couple of assistants from one of our other installations. Orders, Doctor. Science Frontiers isn't exactly a prime government contractor, and my superiors want a little more direct involvement with your work. They are especially interested in work of this nature, since it involves an alien ship of unknown technology."

The woman nodded neutrally, but her eyes suggested she was more than a little disturbed at his unexpected assistance.

As the two men left the scientist's office, Donovan had little to say; he wasn't comfortable around Archangel, and didn't want idle conversation. He had too many unpleasant recollections from his days as an active journalist, when part of his job had been exposing what this man -- and others like him -- did. And, too, dressed as he was in blue jeans and a flannel shirt, he found the immaculate white suit the other man wore just a little...intimidating, even as the

man's attitude daunted him. He left Archangel strictly alone, except as his work dictated, although he privately wondered about the man, and about what the cane and eye-patch signified about his past. And he wondered, too, why Julie seemed so cool and distant...

"Mike?"

Both men turned at the hesitant call. When he recognized Willie, the Visitor fifth-columnist, Archangel nodded a greeting, then left the others to speak privately.

"What is it, Willie?" Donovan asked as the tall man in white limped away.

"You have spoken to Julie?"

"We just left her. Why?"

"Did she seem distinct...uh, distant, to you? She has been very much a loon this morning, and has not spoken to many people."

Donovan looked puzzled for a moment, but he was rapidly becoming familiar with the alien's mangling of his language. "A loon...? Oh, aloof! Right, that's exactly how she seemed. Do you know of anything going on that might account for it?"

Willie shook his head. "But I will watch her, if you wish. If something is wrong, perhaps we can help her."

"You do that, Willie."

Outside the main building of Science Frontiers, Michael Coldsmith-Briggs III, code-named Archangel, slid into the back seat of his waiting limosine. An elegant woman with light coffee-coloured skin, dressed entirely in white, waited for him.

"She's hiding something, Marella," he said. "And I want to know what it is. I told her I'm going to send in some specialists from one of our contractors. She didn't like it, but didn't say a word. As of now, you began working at Humanidyne three years ago, specializing in engineering design. Stetmeyer will handle the paperwork, and I'm sure Dr. Hayes won't protest too much. He knows who pays for those...unusual experiments of his. Tomorrow, you'll be on loan to Science Frontiers."

She nodded in complete understanding. "Of course, sir."

"Parrish won't tell me anything about that alien ship. Find out what's happening there -- and what reasons she may have to cover up information about the aliens. But be careful. Something very strange is going on, and I don't want you taking any unnecessary risks."

"I'm sure I can handle it."

"If I didn't think you could, I wouldn't be sending you in there. Incidentally, I think we'll send Caitlin O'Shaunessy in with you, as a technician. Hawke and Santini are still flying reconnaissance for the Resistance, looking for Diana, and I'm afraid they're too well known by now for this type of work. Caitlin's got a good background in aviation, and she's a former Texas law enforcement officer, so she should be able to take care of herself."

Marella smiled. She knew Caitlin well. "I'm familiar with her background. We should work well together."

* * * * *

The ejection site had been completely cleared, leaving few traces of man or machine. If not for KITT's enhanced senses, they might have passed it altogether. Michael Knight observed his prisoner's reaction to the empty patch of sand, and his increasingly dejected mood, and decided Starbuck couldn't be one of the bad guys after all. He let the man brood during the long drive back to Los Angeles, breaking the silence only once to report to his headquarters when they were in sight of the city.

Devon Miles, head of FLAG, the Foundation for Law and Government, was an urbane gentleman with a great many responsibilities. The Foundation sometimes operated slightly beyond the pale of government knowledge, although supposedly always with the sanction of the proper authorities. Their secrecy and freedom of movement proved invaluable during the height of the Resistance, when the head of Knight Industries coordinated with various shadowy figures to arrange support for groups behind the scenes, provide arms and ammunition, rescue civilians, insure some freedom of knowledge throughout the occupied portions of the country, and encourage cooperation between free zones of every ideology.

One of FLAG's principal weapons was Michael Knight, together with the experimental vehicle he drove -- the Knight Industries Two Thousand, KITT for short. Knight was a man who legally didn't exist. He had been Detective Michael Long of the Los Angeles Police Department before a bullet destroyed his face, before the dying Wilfred Knight recruited him to drive the experimental auto and roam the country, fighting for justice. In his campaign, he had the help of a scientific genius -- Dr. Bonnie Barstowe -- and an expert mechanic -- Reginald Cornelius III, known as R.C.3. He also had the full financial backing of Knight Industries. His battle had begun as a war against crime; now, it was a war against the Visitors.

Miles barely waited for Knight to finish his update report, and was quite abrupt. "Take him to the Legation."

"Are you sure that's wise?" A sidelong glance told him Starbuck wasn't at all fazed by KITT's capabilities, and he wondered what kind of equipment the man was accustomed to.

"Philip's in Los Angeles for the day. He'll want to see your prisoner. And he's in a better position to judge...certain matters."

"Why do I get the feeling there's something you're not telling me, Devon? I mean, it's not like us to go helping the Lizards with anything."

Miles raised an eyebrow. "There have been some new developments, Michael. The Visitors may know your guest. Let's just say, for the time being, that we are cooperating with Philip, using every means at our disposal. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have other matters to attend to." The image on KITT's receiver faded out.

Michael Knight sighed. That's all I can get from him -- and it's not so unusual these days... Something important was going on, but the information from his superior did nothing to abate his curiosity.

As they drove into Los Angeles, Starbuck seemed uncooperative, but much more curious about his

surroundings. Michael delivered the stranger into human security hands at the Visitor Legation, then left for his own rendezvous with the Black Knight Industries semi-trailer, where Bonnie and R.C.3 waited.

As he pulled out of his parking space in front of the Legation, a passing silver-grey Nissan Sentra nearly clipped KITT's bumper.

"What the...?"

"We were parked illegally, Michael," KITT informed him. "The young lady had no reason to expect us in her path."

A glimpse in his rear-view mirror showed Knight an attractive woman of about his own age, with shoulder-length blonde hair. As she drove on down the street, he saw what looked like an artist's portfolio on the passenger seat alongside her. "KITT...?"

The car sighed. "Illinois license plate, XQA 709. Michael, we really don't have time for this," it reproached.

"Check her registration, find out where she's staying, and don't give me any trouble, KITT."

"Oh, very well. The vehicle is registered to a River, R-I-V-E-R, first name..."

* * * * *

"Diana escaped?"

Smith shrugged, not at all concerned by Lydia's mounting anger. "So it seems. It looks like they had a new hide-out all ready; they were moving out when we dropped in on them. I don't know what sort of plans the snake's got, but..."

"You needn't worry, Commander," Tyler interrupted, sneering at Lydia. "We'll find her."

The men standing about nodded emphatically. Their certainty was little consolation to the Visitor officer. She wanted Diana dead. She most definitely did not want vague promises that they'd get her "next time."

"Lydia," Philip said quietly, when it looked as though she might leap on Colonel Smith and use him as a mid-morning snack, "I will finish the debriefing. Perhaps you should check on our other...guest?"

She saluted. "Certainly, Inspector."

She still couldn't get over their new "guest," as Philip insisted on calling him. He was human; that much was easy enough to determine. However, a brief medical study indicated his physiology differed in many ways from that of his fellow humans. A theory was already being discussed -- that the man wasn't from this planet, that he and the other flyer reportedly shot down earlier were advance scouts for another army, perhaps even for the Cylons themselves.

Lydia wasn't certain whether she believed the idea or not. The Visitors' robotic creations had in the past proven incapable of dealing with emotional and illogical modes of behaviour -- and such behaviour was the norm for homo sapiens. Reverting to their original programming, the

Cylons would probably destroy the humans in favour of the Supreme Cosmic Order; they wouldn't work with them!

Of course, she mused, a lot of things could have changed over the years. Maybe humans from space actually have allied with the Cylons. After all, Philip is considering such an alliance with the people of Earth...

She stopped at a monitor screen and stared at the man inside the holding chamber. He was pacing back and forth, studying every inch of the room, obviously searching for any possible means of escape.

Now that she saw him again, she had proof of what she'd only suspected earlier. Their "guest" was an almost perfect double for one of Colonel Smith's men -- Templeton Peck, the one they called Face, or Faceman. And Peck is one of those who let Diana escape...

Struggling to control the venom that rose in her throat in response to her thoughts, Lydia placed her hand over the door lock. The computer recognized the radion patterns implanted in her body-suit, and the lock disengaged. As the door slid open, she strode into the chamber.

The man inside turned to face her, startled by her apparent materialization in his cell. When he actually saw her, however, he relaxed somewhat. "Thank the Lords!" he sighed. "I was expecting to come face to face with a talking lizard." An appreciative gleam appeared in his eyes as he took closer note of her face and form. "I certainly didn't expect a human female, especially not such a lovely one." He smiled engagingly.

Lydia didn't comment on his faulty assumption, although she experienced a sudden urge to retch violently. The last time I was mistaken for a human was when I wanted to be... But so be it. If this human thinks he is dealing with one of his own, he might be more cooperative...

"I am Commander Lydia," she told him. "I hope we have made you comfortable...?" She paused, waiting for a response.

"Look, Lydia," the man said, "you've probably got heaps of questions you want to ask me, right?" He dropped gracefully into a chair, and indicated she should sit as well.

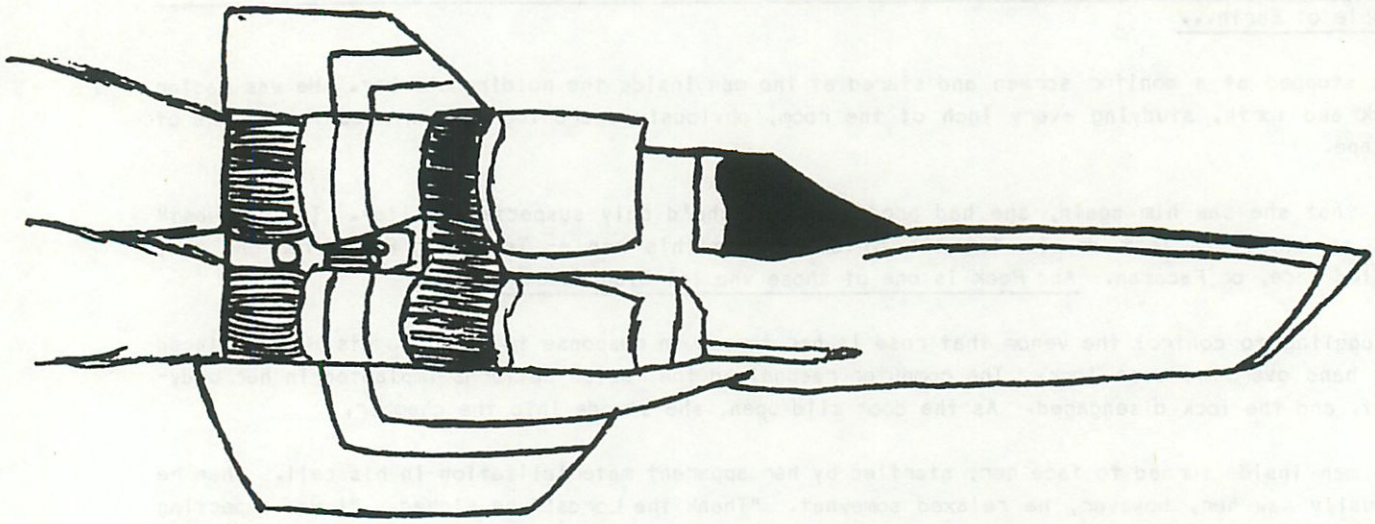
She remained standing. He is not in control here. I must make him understand that... "We are understandably curious about your presence here. We know you are not of this world."

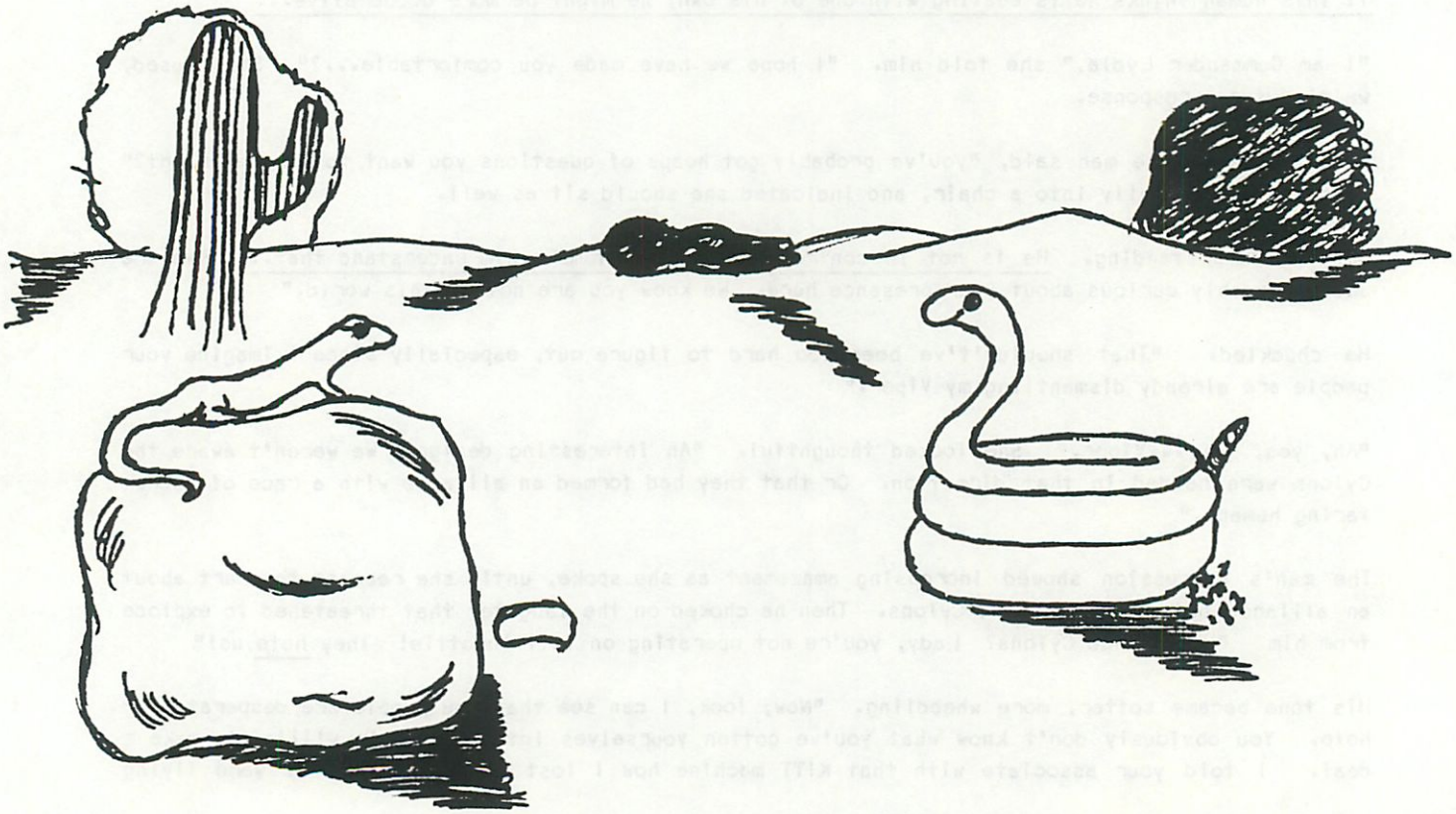
He chuckled. "That shouldn't've been too hard to figure out, especially since I imagine your people are already dismantling my Viper."

"Ah, yes, your...Viper." She looked thoughtful. "An interesting design. We weren't aware the Cylons were headed in that direction. Or that they had formed an alliance with a race of space-faring humans."

The man's expression showed increasing amazement as she spoke, until she reached the part about an alliance between humans and Cylons. Then he choked on the laughter that threatened to explode from him. "Humans and Cylons? Lady, you're not operating on full throttle! They hate us!"

His tone became softer, more wheedling. "Now, look, I can see that you people are desperate for help. You obviously don't know what you've gotten yourselves into. So, I'm willing to make a deal. I told your associate with that KITT machine how I lost my wing-mate. We were flying





recon together when one of your craft shot him down. Now, we know he's alive, and probably in the hands of these Visitor characters..."

He paused to make sure she understood everything, then continued. "I want *him* back. If you agree to help me, I'll talk to my commanding officers about arranging some sort of alliance between us." His voice grew even more coaxing. "Come on, Lydia. We humans need to stick together."

It was all she could do to keep from laughing in his face. As soon as he stopped talking, she folded her arms across her chest and levelled an icy stare at him. "I believe you are mistaken, human," she told him coldly. Almost casually, her forked tongue flickered from between her lips, and the man recoiled violently. "About a great many things."

As the young man stared at her in shock and amazement, Lydia permitted herself a small smile of satisfaction. It was worth enduring his insolence to reduce him to such a state with a casual, off-hand gesture...

Before she could add to his torment, however, the door opened again, admitting Phillip, Tyler, and Colonel Smith's band of mercenaries. "So, Lydia," the Inspector General asked, "how is our guest faring?"

"I would imagine he is very confused right now, Inspector," she replied. "He has not said anything, except that his people are not allied with the Cylons."

"Well, just taking a shot in the dark, I'd say his name was Starbuck." Templeton Peck stepped forward, away from the others. As he came face to face with his doppelgänger from space, the room grew deathly still.

"It's incredible," Face commented at last. He felt slightly queasy. What he had assumed to be a casual resemblance, exaggerated by the conversion process, was instead a dramatic case of mistaken identity.

"You're...me!" Starbuck stammered.

"You think this is the guy your attacker was after?" Smith queried.

Face nodded. "Bet on it. Same uniform, same name, and I don't think I need to mention the facial similarity."

The bemused Starbuck managed to follow very little of the conversation, but finally, at least part of what the others were talking about registered with him. "Same uniform... Apollo! You found Apollo!"

"Dark hair, green eyes, dressed like you?" Face asked.

The Colonial Warrior nodded eagerly. "That's him! Where is he? Is he all right?"

The members of the A-Team exchanged worried looks as Face took Starbuck by the arm and led him back to his chair. "Sit down, Starbuck. There are a few things we need to explain to you, beginning with 'attitude adjustment...'"

* * * * *

I may well be the most ingenious military leader Homeworld has ever known, Diana thought as she studied her reflection in a mirror. With only a handful of loyal supporters, I have managed to gain control of an entire human community, and of the most prominent scientific research and development facility on this planet...

"Which only proves my previous set-backs were the result of incompetent and disloyal followers," she pouted aloud to the image in the glass.

Her intercom buzzed, requesting her attention. "Yes?" she demanded imperiously.

"Commander," one of her lab assistants reported, "Captain Apollo is here. We await your presence to begin the testing."

She smiled. "Good. I shall be down presently."

The Visitor leader wasn't certain why she wanted to run so many tests on the human from space. Nor did she quite know why she permitted work to continue on the spacecraft, or why she took such an interest in the knowledge both subjects yielded. As with most of her greatest discoveries in the past, she simply nursed a suspicion that the key to her victory was hidden in the information she gleaned.

Apollo, as expected, was quite docile. He cooperated with all the tests, and asked a good many questions about what Diana was doing and about the equipment she used. With any other prisoner or subject, she might have been concerned, but her early psychological testing showed curiosity was very strong in the Captain's personality. Aside from that, she actually enjoyed his company.

An hour after the tests were concluded, Diana reviewed the results over a late lunch of field mice. As she studied the genetic scans, she spotted something unusual, and froze in amazement, gripped by excitement.

She had to re-read the data four times before accepting what it said and what it meant. When she was sure, she buzzed Juliet in the main office upstairs. There can be absolutely no margin for error in this. If I am right, I have found the key to incredible power...

"Yes, Diana?"

She's alone, the Commander thought. If she had guests, or was with a member of the Science Frontiers human staff, she would not address me by name...

"Is there any word from Andrew in San Carlos?" She had left the junior lieutenant in the town with a few shock troops, to insure their continued control over the humans there.

"None since this morning."

"Well, get someone on it right away. I want to know what is happening there. I also want a copy of all available data on the Starchild Elizabeth, and on her mother, Robin Maxwell."

* * * * *

Commander Adama was painfully aware of the eyes that surreptitiously followed him as he paced back and forth across the command platform. It seemed to him that everyone on the bridge nursed an unspoken accusation aimed directly at him -- not just because of the disappearance of Apollo

and Starbuck, but also for what their yahrens-old quest had brought them to. "How could I have known?" he murmured aloud to no one in particular.

Omega, the GALACTICA's chief communications officer, turned to him. "Sir?" he asked, as though Adama's mumblings might have been directed at him.

The Commander smiled slightly, and shook his head. "Nothing, Omega. The hollow rantings of a demented old man."

Another officer might not recognize his humour, but Omega had worked with him for yahrens, since long before the final Destruction. He chuckled appreciatively. "Yes, sir."

Adama moved closer, peering over the younger man's shoulder. "Any change?"

He knew there wouldn't be any; if there had been, the efficient Omega would have reported it immediately. But both his question and the answer to it would help convince his crew that he did care, that he wasn't the cold "man of iron" they believed him to be.

Omega shook his head. "No, sir. Nothing since we picked up the emergency beacon from Lieutenant Starbuck."

"Commander, it's time we made contact with Earth's leaders!"

Adama didn't have to turn to know Colonel Tigh stood just behind him. His second-in-command had hammered away at the same theme for close to two centars. It was all the Commander could do to keep from throwing a large, heavy object at his aide, just to get him to shut up -- a highly uncharacteristic response to frustration.

No, he thought, struck by a sudden inspiration. No, don't scream at him. They'll lock you up in Life Station before you can blink. Test him. See how well he's thought this thing through. Sagan knows, with the Cylons closing in, we can't afford to be cautious much longer...

"So, Colonel," he said, slowly turning to face the other man, "what do you propose we do?"

Tigh froze. After two centars of brush-offs, the last thing he expected was for Adama to start listening to him. To his credit, he didn't hesitate long. He took a deep breath. "Commander, we've come unannounced into a highly confusing situation. Our recon patrol has told us nothing, except that somebody down there has enough fire-power to knock our Vipers out of the sky."

"The point, Tigh, the point." A definite edge crept into the older man's voice.

"The point, Commander, is that I believe it is time -- no, past time -- to officially announce our presence in Earth's sector of space. Her people are already involved in a war with an alien race. I fail to see how our presence could send them any deeper into culture shock than they already are. Also, as fellow humans, don't we owe them a warning about the greater danger they face from the Cylons?"

"We don't know the Cylons are the greater threat," the Commander chided. "We know very little about this Visitor race the people of Earth are fighting, other than their reptilian nature."

"All the more reason for us to enter into the situation, to make our presence known. We have no other choice!"

The final test. Now, let's see exactly how much he believes in his plan... "There is another alternative," Adama told his aide. "You say that, as fellow humans, we owe them a warning. Won't we be doing our sister world a greater service by departing this sector, and drawing the Cylons away?"

His words sent a ripple of amazement and consternation through the officers who were close enough to hear him. Slowly, the ripple spread outward, until everyone on the bridge was either talking about, listening to, or speculating on what the Commander had said.

Colonel Tigh ignored everybody but Adama. "Commander," he said sternly, "you know that if we abandon Earth now, we'll have a mutiny on our hands. That planet and the hope it represents are all that has kept this Fleet going for so many yahrens. If you snatch that hope from our people, the Lords of Kobol help us all!"

To everyone's surprise, Commander Adama laughed. "Very well, Colonel, you've convinced me. A diplomatic envoy it is. Omega, prepare to send a planet-wide broadcast. Navigation, find us a good spot for a confrontation between races to take place. Colonel, let me see your list of volunteers."

Tigh passed him the sheet, and Adama looked it over. "Tigh, I want you to take Lieutenants Boomer, Sheba, Jolly, and Greenbean as fighter escort." He looked up at his executive officer, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "I assume, of course, that you planned on yourself as contact officer..."

The Colonel was practically speechless. "I, um, well, Commander, there are really only three people on the GALACTICA who've had any experience at all at this sort of thing, and..."

Adama clapped him on the shoulder. "Say no more, my friend. If the situation weren't so uncertain, I'd go myself." Briefly, he sobered. "All enthusiasm aside, though, there is a great deal of danger in this. We don't even know if they will recognize our flag of truce. I want you to take no chances. I can't afford to lose you, too."

The two friends shared a brief moment of silence, clasping hands. Then Tigh pulled away. "With the Commander's permission, I'll start assembling the escort immediately."

"Father?"

Adama turned to face his daughter. "What is it, Lieutenant?" He put just enough stress on her rank to remind her that, despite the excitement, they were still Commander and subordinate on the bridge of a battlestar.

Athena reddened slightly, but remained determined. "Commander, Colonel Tigh will need a shuttle pilot. In addition to being well-qualified for that position..."

"Overly qualified," Tigh interrupted, correcting her.

She nodded. "Overly qualified, then. In addition, I am also Colonel Tigh's aide. I wish to volunteer to go with the envoy."

The Commander studied his daughter for a long moment. With Apollo gone, with Zac dead, she was his only remaining child. He preferred to keep her on the bridge, out of danger. It was self-

ish, he knew -- the father intruding on the Commander. Unfortunately, in this situation, she's right. She's the best one for the job... "All right," he told her. "Request granted. Get moving, you two."

Athena's eyes widened, her expression rapidly changing from hope to disbelief, then to delight. For a moment, she looked as though she might break all the rules of military decorum and give her father a hug, right on the bridge of his own battlestar. But she restrained herself, settling for a proper salute -- and a broad grin. Then she and Colonel Tigh left the bridge.

Commander Adama turned back to Omega. "Do you have the information I requested?"

The young officer nodded. "Navigation shows a fairly good-sized airfield that should be ideally suited for landing our ships. It would probably be expedient to arrange contact at that point."

He nodded. "Very good. Navigation, transmit data to all ships. Communications, ready for broadcast..."

"Ready, sir."

"Transmit."

Omega pressed several buttons, then signalled the Commander that, whenever he began speaking, he would be heard all across the planet Earth.

Adama took a deep breath, not surprised to find his heart racing. "People of Earth..."

* * * * *

Waiting proved to be a torture in and of itself. At any moment, Julie fully expected Diana or James to appear at the door of her cell, turn off the energy field that locked her in, and escort her to a conversion chamber.

She shuddered. It was five years since she last entered the Visitors' chamber of horrors, and the experience still lived in her subconscious and her nightmares.

Rising, she began to pace the cell, arms crossed over her chest. At least, last time, I didn't know what to expect. Whoever said ignorance is bliss certainly knew what he was talking about...

You beat her before...

The thought seemed to spring out of nowhere, and it stopped her cold. I did, too, didn't I? The realization brought new strength, and new resolve. Maybe I can use my memories of that first trip through the conversion process in my own defence, instead of letting Diana use them to weaken me...

Slowly, she resumed her seat on the lumpy mattress. "I know who I am, and where I am, and I know what that bitch's game is." She forced a smile, hoping the Visitor leader was watching. "How can I lose?"

She spent the next several hours trying to analyze every moment she had spent in the conversion chamber all those years before. It was difficult to maintain an objective distance, but she knew she had to if she were to convince herself that the images she faced in the chamber were just

that -- fantasies drawn from her own fears.

She had no way of knowing whether her preparations would do any good in the end. Remembering the confrontation with her alien double, she suspected they wouldn't. Diana intended to keep Science Frontiers open and running as usual. The company would work for the Visitors' ends; with Juliet in charge, no one would realize it. In fact, no one would even know Julie was missing, and that would give Diana all the time she wanted to exact her revenge.

"Hello, Julie."

She looked up as the dark-haired Visitor leader entered the cell, flanked by two men she didn't recognize. One was a Visitor; the other was a young man in a tan outfit resembling a uniform. As Diana approached, she rose to her feet, trying to adopt a defiant stance.

The action only served to amuse the Visitor commander, who chuckled. "My, my. Ready for anything, aren't we? How nice."

"We aim to please." Her sarcastic tone was unmistakable. Hatred steadied her, enabling her to match her enemy's expression.

"Julie, dear," Diana sighed dramatically, "you have always misread my intentions." Her gaze hardened slightly. "But there is plenty of time to discuss our past relationship." Julie couldn't control a shudder as she thought of all the hidden implications in that simple statement, and the Visitor smiled at her victory. "I have brought someone for you, a man I know you will want to talk to." She gestured at the darker of her companions, the one in tan pants and tunic.

The blonde scientist spared the man the briefest of glances, preferring to keep her attention on Diana. If this is one of her tricks, I refuse to be taken in by it...

The reptilian woman laughed lightly. "Oh, don't worry, Julie. He is one of your people. Or perhaps I should say you are both humans. He is not of this planet, you see. His attitude, however, is much better than yours. He understands the benefits of cooperating with me."

She turned to the young man. "Apollo, this is Julie Parrish, an Earth scientist who believes me to be her enemy. She does not understand the danger we now face, and the dire necessity for us to work together as friends. You must tell her all about yourself, about where you come from, and most especially about the threat the Cylons pose to us all.

"Julie, after you speak with Apollo, I hope you will be in a more agreeable mood. Now, Douglas and I will leave you to your discussion." With the barest of nods, she left, followed closely by her Visitor guard.

Julie couldn't help staring at the young man who smiled so congenially at her. Studying him, she felt a rush of pity. You poor bastard, you never had a chance...

He didn't notice her expression -- or, if he did, he chose not to comment on it. Instead, he took a seat beside her. "Hello, Julie. I'm Captain Apollo of the battlestar GALACTICA. According to Diana, you and I have some things to discuss."

"Ha! That's a good one. Forgive me, Captain, because I'm sure you're really a wonderful person under normal circumstances. You see, though, you've been converted, and therefore, I can't be

expected to believe anything you say."

Instead of offering the sickeningly sweet "Visitors are your friends" pitch she expected, the young man sobered. "You have to listen to me," he said earnestly. "You have to understand what your people have done by summoning the Cylons to Earth."

Cylons... Oh, no! In her mind, she saw herself standing with Mike Donovan on a windswept hillside, monitoring the Resistance broadcast that asked for aid from the Cylons. We knew nothing about the race we called, the race we put so much faith in... In this case, it seems the solution we sought might be potentially far worse than the problem we have... "Who exactly are you?" she asked, her voice shaky.

Apollo took her hand in his. "I'm from a great ship called a battlestar. I was flying a fighter craft very similar to the one you and your scientists are investigating upstairs."

That confused her, until she realized he was talking about her double. Well, if he doesn't know about the bodysuits, maybe he really isn't one of Diana's people... "You said something about Cylons. So did Diana, for that matter. Tell me what you know about them. Did she explain that they are enemies of her people?"

He smiled at her as if she were a child incapable of grasping the gravity of a situation. "Julie, the Cylons are the enemies of every freedom-loving, free-thinking race in the universe. Their standing order where humans are concerned is total extermination.

"Listen to me. Yahrens ago, my people lived in a system of twelve worlds. Our society had reached a level of culture, commerce, and peace that most civilisations only dream about..."

As he spun his tale of total destruction, Julie's eyes brimmed with tears; she realized what she and Mike had unwittingly brought to the war-ravaged Earth. It all makes sense. Even if he's only parroting Diana's words, I can't take the chance that they're her usual lies. Too much is at stake...

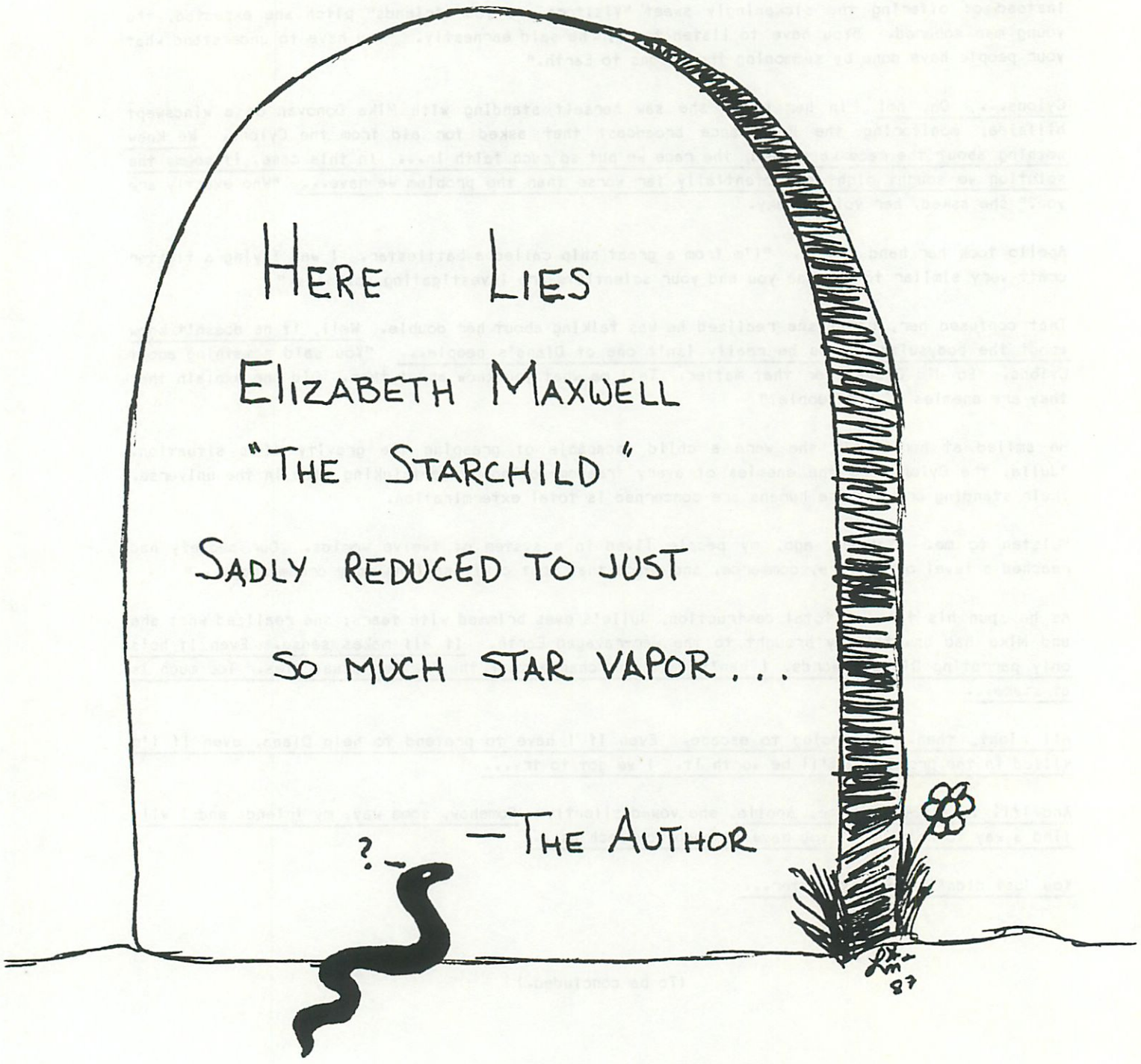
All right, then. I'm going to escape. Even if I have to pretend to help Diana, even if I'm killed in the process, it'll be worth it. I've got to try...

And I'll take you with me, Apollo, she vowed silently. Somehow, some way, my friends and I will find a way to help you. You have so much to teach us...

You just didn't know any better...

(To be concluded.)




HERE LIES
ELIZABETH MAXWELL
"THE STARCHILD"
SADLY REDUCED TO JUST
SO MUCH STAR VAPOR...
—THE AUTHOR
?

FROM DEEP SPACE...

A long time ago, in another fanzine -- the ubiquitous PURPLE AND ORANGE? -- we began to use this final space for comments and observations, news, and thanks to everyone who worked on each zine. We would like to continue what has become a tradition, here in THE OSIRIS FILES.

As most fans know by now, science fiction and fantasy might be alive and very well indeed -- but certainly not on American television. Except for WEREWOLF, MAX HEADROOM -- cancelled as of mid-October 1987 -- and STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION, there really isn't much science fiction left on the small screen. And, let's face it, as fantasy, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST leaves a great deal to be desired. Of course, there remains all that wonderful British programming...

A sad note, as our only bit of news in this issue. Lorne Greene, best known as BONANZA's Ben Cartwright, died on 11 September 1987 at the age of 72. BATTLESTAR GALACTICA fans will remember him as the stern, paternal Commander Adama, who led his "rag-tag fugitive fleet" on their lonely quest for Earth. We will miss him.

There remain a number of people who have done outstanding work for this premiere issue of THE OSIRIS FILES. Linda Ruth Pfonner is a master of mayhem and cruelty to dumb characters. She has, over the years, managed to mangle her principals with the best of them -- but always for the sake of the story. For us, she rather thoroughly "trashed" Stringfellow Hawke, in a story AIRWOLF fans are never likely to forget.

Mary Robertson has written many things for OSIRIS Publications in the past, and continues to prove her talent in THE OSIRIS FILES. "Angels We Have Heard on High" is a little gem of characterisation, and we look forward to lots more.

Lisa Mudano makes her first appearance as an author in this issue of our zine. A skilled writer with interests in many media universes, she is also a competent proofreader, an excellent plotter and advisor, and a wonderful provider of moral support. Not only that, but she can draw, too! She is a highly versatile young lady, and we are delighted to welcome her to our staff.

Proofreaders Mary Greeley and David Morgan have done similar meticulous work for us on other publications, and always manage to find the things we miss. They are the ones who add our final polish, and we could never do as well without them.

We have known artist Joan Hanke-Woods for nearly as many years as we have known fandom; we have loved her work all that time, and are always proud to publish more of it. Toni Hardeman is fast becoming an old friend, and she keeps on getting better and better; you will undoubtedly see a lot more of her in the future. And Suzette Henderson is another promising newcomer; keep an eye on her!

Our sincere thanks to all the people named here, and to all the others who have given us their assistance and advise in preparing THE OSIRIS FILES #1. Our fanzine wouldn't be what it is without them.

And now, an appeal to you, our readers. Please write, and let us know what you think of this first OSIRIS Publications effort at a general media zine. Your letters of comment will appear in THE OSIRIS FILES #2, in print for Memorial Day of 1988. We look forward to seeing you then!



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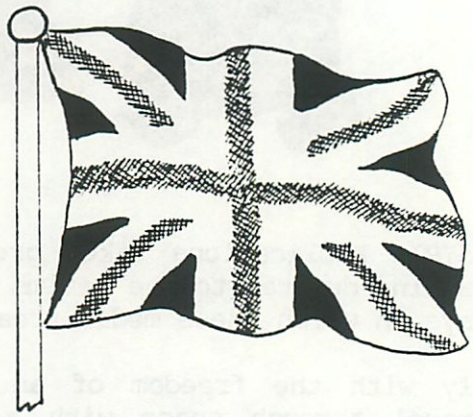
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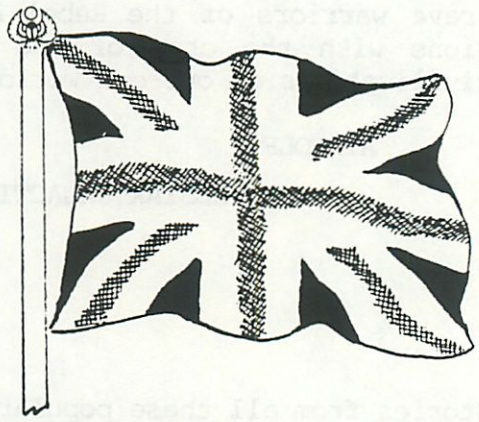
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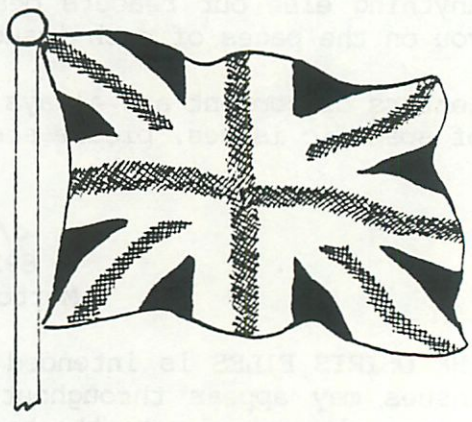
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We urge all those who want to see their work in print, who want to share their writing and art with others in fandom, to submit their efforts for our consideration. For additional information on submissions, please refer to the back of this flyer.

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